# Combat

written by CresthavenRPG Guru | November 14, 2014

Combat in Cresthaven is fast, tactical, and dangerous. Every round represents a few seconds of action where positioning, timing, and choices matter. This guide breaks down exactly how combat works, step-by-step.

## Quick Start Combat Summary

Essential Steps:

1. **Surprise Check** – Do monsters or players notice each other first?
2. **Declare Actions** – Everyone says what they want to do.
3. **Roll Initiative** – d20, highest goes first.
4. **Take Actions** – Move, attack, cast spells, ready action, etc.
5. **Resolve Damage** – Roll damage dice and apply to hit points.
6. **Check Morale** – Do damaged creatures flee or surrender?
7. **New Round** – Repeat steps 2-6 until combat ends.

Each round follows the same structure.

### Visual Combat Flow:

[Surprise?] → [Declare Actions] → [Roll Initiative] → [Take Turns] → [Resolve Damage] → [Check Morale] → [Repeat or End]

## Key Terms

These are core mechanics and phrases used frequently throughout combat and adventuring.

### Ability Saves

When you’re resisting a physical, mental, or magical threat, you may be asked to make an Ability Save. This is a roll using one of your six abilities (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma), plus your Ability Focus if applicable.

Ability Save = d20 + Ability Modifier (+ Focus if applicable)

 Example: A Dexterity Save to avoid falling debris, or a Constitution Save to resist poison.

### Ability Focus

Each class has one primary ability score (e.g., Strength for Barbarians, Wisdom for Clerics). The Ability Focus bonus = your level ÷ 2 (rounded up)

and is added to all rolls using that ability.

Example: A level 3 Barbarian (Strength-focused) gains +2 to all Strength-based rolls (attacks, checks, saves, etc.).

This is also used to calculate Notice (if your focus is Wisdom) and to improve spellcasting rolls (for casters).

### Advantage

Roll 2d20 and keep the higher result. Advantage is typically gained from tactical positioning, surprise, class abilities, or specific conditions.

 Example: Attacking from stealth, or while invisible, grants Advantage.

### Armor Class (AC)

Represents how hard a creature is to hit.

- If your Attack Roll ≥ AC, the attack hits.
- If Attack Roll < AC, it misses.

### Conditions

During battle, characters may suffer from conditions—temporary states that affect movement, actions, or defenses. Some are caused by spells or terrain (like Slowed), others by enemy abilities (like Stunned or Poisoned).

### Disadvantage

Roll 2d20 and keep the lower result. Disadvantage is often caused by poor visibility, status effects (e.g. Blinded, Exhausted), or difficult terrain.

### Initiative

Determines turn order in combat. All players and enemies roll a d20 at the start of each round.

- Highest roll goes first, then descending order.
- Tied initiative rolls happen together
- Initiative is re-rolled every round.

### Morale

A measure of a creature’s willingness to continue fighting. When a creature drops below 50% HP, it may be forced to make a Morale check or become Broken (flee or surrender).

### Natural 20

Rolling exactly 20 on a d20. This is a critical success, usually meaning double damage or exceptional results.

### Natural 1

Rolling exactly 1 on a d20. This is a critical failure, often resulting in mishaps, wasted resources, or harmful consequences.

### Notice

A passive ability score used to detect danger, hidden creatures, or secret doors. The DM rolls against your Notice when determining surprise, traps, or hidden elements.

Notice = 10 + Wisdom modifier + Ability Focus (if your class is focused in Wisdom)

Each character calculates their own Notice score.

 Example: A Cleric (Wisdom-focused) with a +1 Wisdom modifier at level 4 has: 10 + 1 (WIS) + 2 (Ability Focus) = 13 Notice

### Turn Undead

A special ability available to clerics that allows them to drive away or destroy undead creatures. This counts as one main action during combat. See Turn Undead.

## Before Combat: Setting Up the Encounter

Before combat starts, you need to answer a few questions:

1. Where are the players standing in the Marching Order?
2. Have the monsters or players noticed each other?
3. What will the monsters do when they see the players?

### Marching Order

Knowing where everyone is in the Marching Order is important for setting up the scene. The DM will tell the players how big the space is and how many characters can stand side-by-side. Characters who are not in front cannot engage in melee combat, but can use reach or ranged weapons. Having your Caller instruct the DM on where you want to stand can be helpful. A narrow passage may only support single-file travel!

Establish character positions before encounters:

- **Front:** Can engage in melee, triggers traps first, gets attacked first.
- **Middle:** Protected (+2 AC if at least 50% obscured), can use polearms or ranged weapons.
- **Back:** Safest position, limited to ranged attacks and long weapons.

Example: In a narrow corridor: Fighter (front), Cleric (middle), Wizard (back). If ambushed, the Fighter gets attacked first but the Wizard is protected.

### Surprise Check

Who notices whom first?

1. DM rolls d20 + monster's Stealth (or Wisdom if not sneaky).
2. Compare to party's highest Notice score.
3. If DM rolls higher: Monsters surprise the party (roll on Monster Reaction Chart).
4. If DM rolls lower: Players notice first and can choose to Ambush, Evade, or Negotiate.

## Pre-Combat Options

### Evading Monsters

If the players don't want to fight, they can try to Evade the monsters by hiding or sneaking past them.

- Move slowly and carefully (1/10 normal speed) to sneak past.
- Slow but avoids combat entirely.

### Ambush

If the players want to surprise the monsters, they can try an Ambush.

- Party rolls d20 + lowest Wisdom modifier in group = Hide DC.
- DM rolls d20 + monster's Notice.
- Success: Party gets one free round of attacks.
- Failure: Normal combat begins.

### Negotiation

Some monsters may be willing to negotiate instead of fighting. If the players can communicate with them, they may suggest making an agreement.

- Not all monsters want to fight.
- Some may accept bribes, be intimidated, or seek to bargain.
- Depends on monster intelligence and situation.

# Combat Round Structure

## Step 1: Declare Actions

All players declare their intended action before rolling initiative to lock in strategy and prevent meta-reversals. This especially affects spellcasting and reactions.

- Declare before rolling Initiative.
- Spells, attacks, and movement are locked in once declared – even if you change your mind after initiative is rolled.
- “I’m casting a spell.” and then the spell you are casting
- “I’m attacking with my sword.”
- “I’m moving behind cover and shooting.”
- “I’m trying to flee.”

DM Tip: Players can discuss strategy briefly during this phase, but must commit to an action before rolling initiative.

⚠ Important: Spells can be interrupted if the caster takes damage before their turn!

## Step 2: Roll Initiative

Initiative determines who acts first. Everyone rolls a new initiative at the start of each round.

- Players individually roll 1d20 and add any initiative modifiers (bonuses, spells, condition effects, etc).
- The DM rolls 1d20 for each monster group (e.g., all goblins together, a dragon separately).
- Highest roll goes first, then descending order.

### Initiative Ties

If two combatants (player or monster) roll the same initiative, their actions are considered to occur simultaneously. The player may resolve their action first for clarity, but even if their target is killed or incapacitated by the attack, the tied opponent still completes their declared action before dying.

This reflects the chaos of close combat and ensures both sides act during the moment of conflict. Magic spells, damage, and movement all still apply as

declared.

Example: A goblin and a wizard both roll a 12 for initiative. The wizard casts a firebolt and kills the goblin. Despite this, the goblin still gets to throw its spear, and the damage is resolved before it falls.

**Conditions Reminder**

Some conditions may apply penalties to initiative rolls or limit actions this round (e.g., Stunned, Slowed, or Exhausted). Check your current status before rolling.

## Step 3: Take Actions (In Initiative Order)

Each character may take ONE main action per turn: Move, Attack, Cast a Spell, Use an Item, Flee, Hold Initiative, or perform a Special Action (like Grapple, Disarm). Some spells, class features, or magic effects (like Haste) may allow additional actions or attacks.

- **Move** (up to movement speed)
- **Attack** (melee, ranged, or spell) Note: Some class abilities or magical effects (e.g., Haste spell) may grant multiple attacks as part of a single Attack action.
- **Cast a Spell**
- **Turn Undead** (clerics only)
- **Use an Item** or **Equip Item**
- **Flee** (move at double speed away from combat, but provokes opportunity attacks from enemies in melee range or with readied weapons). If the fleeing character survives, they are removed from the encounter unless the DM declares pursuit or re-entry.
- **Hold Initiative**: You can choose to wait until another creature (friend or foe) has acted before taking your turn. When you hold initiative, you act immediately after the chosen creature, even if their initiative is lower than yours. You maintain your original initiative score for subsequent rounds.
    - Example: You want to wait for your ally to distract a guard before you move. You hold initiative to act right after them, even if they rolled lower.

- **Perform other actions** (hide, etc.)

## Spell Interruption Reminder

If a spellcaster declared a spell but takes damage before their turn, the spell fails and mana is still consumed. If a wizard says, ‘I’m casting Fireball,’ and takes an arrow to the gut before their turn—they lose the spell and the mana.

**Common Conditions That Affect Your Turn**

- **Dazed:** Enemies have Advantage against you; you lose your next attack.
- **Slowed:** Move at half speed, and you may only attack every other round.
- **Stunned:** You take no actions this turn, but may still make saving throws.
- **Immobilized:** Your speed is 0—you cannot move without assistance.
- **Encumbered:** Half speed if carrying too much gear.
- **Exhausted:** Disadvantage on all rolls; movement halved.

⚠ Always check if a condition is active at the start of your turn!

**Opportunity Attacks**

If a combatant leaves an enemy's melee range, they may make one free melee attack against them.

- Must be within 5 feet or have a readied reach weapon.
- Must have a weapon already drawn or nocked.

## Step 4: Resolve Damage

- Roll weapon damage dice.
- Add bonuses (Strength for melee, magic weapon bonuses, etc.).
- Apply total damage to target's hit points.

**Damage Modifiers:**

**Resistance:** Take half damage from a specific type (e.g., fire, cold, slashing).

**Vulnerability:** Take double damage from a specific type (e.g., fire, holy water).

⚠ Apply resistance or vulnerability after all modifiers are calculated.

## Damage Resistance

Some creatures, constructs, and armored vehicles (like dragons, golems, or airships) are so durable that ordinary weapons barely scratch them. This toughness is represented by Damage Resistance, or DR.

Think of DR as a layer of protection that shrugs off small hits, like trying to cut through stone with a butter knife.

**How it Works**

If a target has DR, you subtract that number from the total damage after a successful hit.

Step-by-Step:

- Roll your attack as normal.
- If it hits, roll your damage.
- Subtract the creature’s DR from the damage.
- Apply what’s left. (Minimum damage is 0.)

Example:
An iron golem has DR 5. A character hits it and rolls 7 damage. The golem takes only 2 damage.
If the attack had only dealt 4 damage, it would have been completely absorbed, no damage is dealt.

DR makes it harder to take down high-end threats without clever tactics, magic, or very powerful strikes.

## Magical Damage Immunity

Some creatures are immune to non-magical weapons entirely. In these cases, the creature can only be harmed by:

- Weapons explicitly labeled as magical
- Spells or magical effects that deal damage
- Specific conditions or vulnerabilities called out in the creature’s description

Example:
A specter might pass harmlessly through arrows and blades, but a magic sword or fireball still harms it.

If a creature requires magical damage, non-magical attacks automatically deal 0 damage, even on a hit.

**Perpetual Damage**

If the target is suffering from a condition like Perpetual Damage (e.g., 5 acid/round), apply it at the start of their next turn unless cured or dispelled.

## Natural Roll Consequences

**Natural 20:** Double the final damage total. Check out random critical hits chart

**Natural 1:** May have special negative effects (DM’s choice). Critical Miss

Chart

### Death and Unconsciousness

If damage reduces a creature to 0 HP, the creature is removed from combat

If damage reduces a player character to 0 HP, then begin Death Saves (see Special Combat Situations).

### Step 5: Check Morale

When any creature drops below 50% hit points, they must make a morale check:

- Roll d20 + Wisdom bonus (or Morale bonus for monsters).
- DC 20 to continue fighting.
- If last attack was a Natural 20: Roll with disadvantage (roll twice, take lower).
- Failure: Creature becomes “Broken” (see Special Combat Situations).

### Step 6: Continue or End Combat

If enemies remain and morale holds, start a new round by declairing actions.

Combat ends when all enemies are defeated, fled, or surrendered.

## Understanding Armor Class (AC)

Armor Class (AC) represents how hard a creature is to hit. When you make an attack, you roll a d20 and add your attack bonus. If your total equals or exceeds the target’s AC, you hit.

### Base AC Formula (for most characters):

10 + Armor Bonus + Shield Bonus + Dexterity Modifier + Magic Bonuses + Other Modifiers
Example: A rogue wearing light armor (+2) and a Dexterity modifier of +3 has AC 15 (10 + 2 + 3).

### What Modifies AC?

Armor and Equipment:

- **Armor:** Light, medium, and heavy armor set your base AC and limit Dexterity bonuses differently.
- **Shields:** Add a flat bonus (usually +1 or +2) to AC when equipped.

Dexterity Modifier:

- Applies to AC unless specifically called out

Magical Effects:

- Some spells, or enchanted armor/weapons, may increase AC temporarily or permanently.

Cover:

- **Half Cover:** +2 AC
- **Three-Quarter Cover:** +4 AC
- **Full Cover:** Cannot be targeted

Conditions That Affect AC:

- **Invisible:** +10 AC vs attacks (unless attacker can detect you)
- **Prone:** +2 AC vs ranged, -2 AC vs melee
- **Paralyzed:** Treated as AC 10; attackers have Advantage
- **Blinded:** Enemies have Advantage (effectively lowering your AC)

### To Hit a Target

Attack Roll = d20 + Ability Modifier + Weapon Bonus

- If Attack Roll ≥ AC, the attack hits.
- If Attack Roll < AC, it misses.

Example: A fighter swings at a goblin (AC 13). She rolls d20 (11) + STR (+2) + weapon bonus (+1) = 14 → Hit!

## Attack Types

### Melee Attacks

A melee attack is a direct, close-quarters strike with a hand-held weapon such as a sword, axe, mace, or dagger. Melee attacks can only be made against creatures within reach—typically 5 to 10 feet, depending on the weapon used. Combatants within melee range are considered engaged.

Characters add their Strength modifier to both their attack roll and damage roll when using melee weapons, unless otherwise specified (e.g., finesse

weapons may allow Dexterity instead).

**Random Melee Targeting**

When a character is surrounded by multiple enemies, the target of a melee attack must be chosen at random unless circumstances (such as positioning, visibility, or declared intent) allow otherwise. Melee combat is chaotic—blades clash, foes move, and opportunities shift by the second. A momentary lapse is all it takes for a blow to land.

If a creature has multiple melee attacks in the same round (due to class abilities or natural weapons), all strikes must be directed at the same target unless a rule or ability specifically allows otherwise.

 Reminder: Before you roll to hit, make sure you understand how Armor Class (AC) works. See the section above if needed.

- **To Hit:** Roll d20 + Strength bonus + weapon bonus vs target's AC (plus environmental bonuses like cover).
- **Damage:** Roll weapon damage + Strength bonus.

Special Results:

- **Natural 20:** Double the final damage total. Check out random critical hits chart
- **Natural 1:** May have special negative effects (DM's choice). Critical Miss Chart

**Example:** Fighter attacks goblin (AC 14). Rolls d20 (12) + Strength (+2) + sword bonus (+1) = 15. Hit! Rolls 1d8 (5) + Strength (+2) = 7 damage.

## Ranged Attacks

A ranged attack is any attack made with a projectile or thrown weapon, such as a bow, crossbow, sling, or hand axe. Ranged attacks rely on Dexterity to determine accuracy: the character's Dexterity modifier is added to the attack roll, but not to damage (unless specified by class or ability).

Ranged attacks must target a creature within the weapon's effective range. If a ranged attack is made into a melee, that is, at a target currently engaged in close combat, the attacker cannot choose the specific recipient of the shot. The actual target is determined randomly among all combatants involved in that melee. This means there is a risk of striking an ally.

**Random Ranged Targeting**

Missile fire into melee is always risky. Arrows fly where the chaos of combat allows, not always where the archer intends.

Thrown weapons follow the same targeting rules as bows and crossbows, though they often have shorter range and heavier penalties beyond short distance.

- **To Hit:** Roll d20 + Dexterity modifier + weapon bonus vs target’s AC.
- **Out of Range:** If the target is beyond your weapon’s maximum range, the attack automatically misses, even if the attack roll was successful.

⚠ Note: Range is determined after the attack roll is made. It’s possible (and common) for a declared target to move out of range before your turn, especially if they act before you in the initiative order.

- **Damage:** Use the weapon’s damage dice. Do not add Strength or Dexterity to the damage.
- **Range Penalties:** Apply a –2 penalty for each additional short range increment beyond the first.

Special Results:

- **Natural 20:** Double the total damage dealt.
- **Natural 1:** The attack misfires, effects determined by the DM (e.g., bowstring snaps, weapon jams).

**Understanding Weapon Ranges**

Ranged weapons list two numbers: [Short Range] / [Maximum Range]

Range Segment Distance To-Hit Penalty

- 1st Segment Up to Short Range None
- 2nd Segment Short × 2: –2 to hit
- 3rd Segment Short × 3: –4 to hit
- 4th Segment Up to Max Range: –6 to hit
- Beyond Max Over Max Range Cannot Attack

Example: Crossbow (80 / 320 feet)

- 0–80 ft No Penalty
- 81–160 ft –2 to hit
- 161–240 ft –4 to hit
- 241–320 ft –6 to hit
- 321+ ft Cannot Attack

## Spell Casting

Spells are powerful but fragile actions that require concentration and timing. Unlike physical attacks, spellcasting does not require an attack roll, and successful spell will always hit its target. If the target is valid and within range, the spell takes effect automatically unless the spell allows a saving throw or is interrupted.

Casters must have a clear view of their target to cast a spell on them. Spells may target a creature, a location, or an item, depending on the spell's description. If the spell creates an area of effect, it impacts everything within that area, including allies. If the caster takes damage before the spell completes, the spell fails and its mana is still consumed.

**To Cast:** Roll d20 + casting ability (INT/WIS) + Focus vs DC (10 + spell level).

**Effects:** Varies by spell.

Results:

- **Success:** Spell takes effect on the caster's initiative turn.
- **Failure:** Spell fails, mana still consumed.

**Example:** 3rd level Wizard (INT +3, Focus +2) casts 2nd level spell. Rolls d20 (7) + INT (+3) + Focus (+2) = 12 vs DC 12 (10 + 2). Success!

**Interrupted Spells**

If a spellcaster declared a spell during Step 1 but takes damage before their turn in initiative order, the spell is interrupted:

- The spell fails to take effect
- The mana is still consumed as if the spell had been cast
- The caster loses their action for that round

This represents the disruption of concentration required for spellcasting

**Example:** A wizard declares "I'm casting Sleep" but gets shot by an archer who goes before them in initiative. The Sleep spell fails, the wizard loses the mana point, and their turn is wasted.

## Improvised Attacks

**To Hit:** d20 + Dexterity bonus vs AC.

**Range:** 20 feet + Strength bonus – 1 foot per pound of object.

**Damage:** 1 point per pound.

### Unarmed Combat

Brawling attacks, such as those conducted with fist, foot, or dagger pommel, will normally inflict 1d2 points of damage.

### Two-Weapon Fighting

If a character desires to fight with one weapon in each hand, the off-hand weapon must be either a dagger or a hand axe.

- **Primary:** Your dominant hand’s weapon.
- **Off-hand:** The smaller weapon in your other hand.

You must declare both weapons and take penalties (-2 / -4) to attack rolls. The weapon in the primary hand attacks with a -2 modifier, and the off-hand weapon attacks at -4. Only one attack per weapon per round unless otherwise stated by class.

## Special Combat Situations

### Backstab

Thieves and Halflings are masters of the knife in the back, delivering greatly increased damage when attacking by surprise and from behind.

To Backstab, the character must:

- Be behind the target.
- Be hidden or otherwise undetected.
- The victim must be generally humanoid and have a definable back (e.g., no slimes, jellies, oozes).
- Be able to reach a significant target area (e.g., cannot backstab a giant in the ankle for full effect).

How it Works:

- Attack Roll: You roll to hit with Advantage.
- Damage: On a hit, the weapon’s standard damage (before modifiers for Strength or weapon bonuses) is multiplied by the character’s specific backstab multiplier. Strength and magical weapon bonuses are then added to this multiplied total.

⚠ Backstabbing Limitations:

The damage multiplier applies only to the first attack made by the thief, even if multiple attacks are possible. The initial surprise advantage is lost after the first blow.

## Broken Creatures (Failed Morale)

Broken Creatures must immediately do one of the following:

- Flee: Move away at double speed. Enemies with readied ranged weapons get one free attack.
- Surrender: Drop weapons and plead for mercy.

Example: Goblin takes 4 damage, dropping to 2 hit points (below 50%). Rolls d20 (5) + Morale (+0) = 5 vs DC 20. Fails! Goblin flees at double speed. Archer shoots at fleeing goblin.

## Called Shot

When a player is making a ranged attack, they may instead declare a called shot. A called shot is a deliberate attempt to strike a specific body part or item worn or held by the target. This allows the attacker to impose tactical effects at the cost of accuracy.

How it works

- A called shot must be declared during Step 1: Declare Actions.
- The attacker specifies the targeted area and desired effect (see examples below).
- The attack roll suffers an additional –5 penalty.

If the attack hits, it deals normal damage plus the effect listed for the chosen target.

If the attack misses, resolve it as a standard miss.

A natural 20 always counts as a hit and automatically applies the called shot effect.

**Example Called Shots & Effects**

- Head: The target must make a Constitution Save (DC 10). On failure, the target is instantly killed. On success, the attack becomes a critical hit (double damage). Only available to ranged weapons against creatures with heads not wearing full helmets.
- Hand: Target must make a Strength Save or drop held weapon or item.
- Leg / Foot: Target gains the Slowed condition for 1d4 rounds. If already prone or Slowed, they immediately fall prone.

- Wings / Flight Organ: Target immediately falls or becomes grounded for 1d4 rounds.

**Restrictions**

- Called shots must be made with ranged weapons unless the DM allows otherwise.
- Cannot be combined with backstab, sneak attack, or multi-attack bonuses.
- DM discretion applies—some creatures (e.g. slimes, golems, undead) may be immune to specific effects due to anatomy or armor.

## Charge!

A combatant can choose to charge a target. In doing so, they move at up to double their current movement rate and make one attack with a +2 bonus but suffer a -2 to their Armor Class in the following round for all attacks. Note: The attacker cannot be currently engaged in combat (toe-to-toe), but could charge another opponent if the current combatant is defeated.

## Death Saves

When a player character is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, they begin making Death Saving Throws immediately after the current round completes.

Roll 1d20 repeatedly until the character reaches 3 successes or 3 failures—whichever comes first.

- A roll of 10 or higher = 1 Success
- A roll of 9 or lower = 1 Failure
- 3 Successes = The character is stabilized at 0 HP
- 3 Failures = The character dies

You do not wait between rolls as they are made one after another, resolving the character’s fate quickly.

## Disarm

Instead of attacking, the combatant may attempt to disarm their opponent. You and the defender make opposed Strength checks.

- If you beat the defender, the defender is disarmed.
- If you attempted the disarm action unarmed, you now have the weapon.
- If you were armed, the defender’s weapon is on the ground in the defender’s square.
- If you fail on the disarm attempt, the defender may immediately attack

with Advantage.

## Grapple

How it Works: You and the defender make opposed Strength checks.

- Success: If you beat the defender, the defender is GRAPPLED and loses their next attack.
- Failure: If the defender wins, the grapple is unsuccessful.

**Breaking a Grapple:** A GRAPPLED creature's only action on their next turn is to attempt to break free by making another opposed Strength check.

**Pinning:** If the grappler beats the opposed roll by 5 or more, the grappled person becomes PINNED. Pinned combatants can be easily immobilized using rope or other restraints.

## Heroic Points

Each player typically starts with 1–3 Heroic Points per session or adventure (DM's discretion). These do not refresh until granted again by the DM. Once per combat, spend a Heroic Point to gain one of the following benefits:

- Re-roll a dice roll and keep the new roll.
- Add Advantage to any roll.
- Gain an additional action in a combat round (allowing you to move AND attack, cast two spells, etc.).
- Perform a Healing Surge (roll your hit dice and recover that many Hit Points).

## Parry

If a player character has not yet acted during the round and comes after the attacker in initiative order, they may choose to parry instead of taking their turn.

- The character gives up their action for the round.
- When targeted by a melee attack, the character may subtract their melee "to hit" bonus from the opponent's attack roll.

Example: A fighter with a +4 to hit chooses to parry. An enemy rolls to attack and gets 17. The fighter subtracts 4 (from their to-hit bonus), reducing the enemy's result to 13. If that is below the fighter's AC, the attack misses.

Important notes:

- Parrying is only available before the character has acted that round.
- Parrying is only effective against melee attacks.
- The character forfeits their action for the round, including movement and reactions.

### Ready Action

Sometimes combat isn’t just about swinging weapons—it’s about setting the field. A Ready Action can be used to prepare a trap, environmental hazard, or tactical condition that triggers later in the round.
Examples:

- Spreading caltrops in a choke point to slow a charging enemy.
- Rigging a tripwire at a doorway and waiting for someone to enter.
- Pouring oil on the ground in preparation for a fire spell.
- Ready your net to drop on the first creature to pass beneath.

**How it Works:**

On your turn, describe what you’re doing and what will trigger it.

“I scatter caltrops in front of the door and ready my action: if anything opens it, I slam it shut again and yell to alert the party.”

If the trigger occurs, you may act immediately before the triggering creature completes its action.

If the trigger doesn’t occur, your action is wasted.

**Limits & Requirements:**

- You must have the item or tools ready (e.g., caltrops, tripwire, flask of oil).
- The action must be something you can reasonably perform in one round.
- Setting more elaborate traps requires time, planning, or rolls (see DM).

Use Ready Actions to control the battlefield, force movement, or punish aggression. When paired with difficult terrain or choke points, even a handful of nails can turn the tide.

## Special Attack Conditions and Combat Conditions

Certain creatures, traps, and spells inflict special attack effects beyond ordinary damage. These effects are detailed in monster abilities or spell

descriptions and often require the target to make an ability save to resist or reduce the effect. Not all special attacks allow a save. Some are automatic and devastating. Refer to this section when resolving such effects during combat.

### Charm

A mental manipulation that causes the target to view the caster as an ally.

Effects:

- Target cannot attack the caster.
- Will defend the caster as if they were an ally.
- Target may follow suggestions.

### Confusion

A magical disorientation that causes erratic behavior.

Effects:

Target rolls 1d6 each round:

- 1–2: Do nothing
- 3–4: Attack nearest
- 5: Flee
- 6: Act normally

### Energy Drain

A deadly effect with no ability save allowed. When struck by a creature with energy drain (such as a wight or wraith), the effect takes hold instantly.

Effects:

- The victim loses 1 full level (for player characters) or 1 Hit Die (for monsters).
- All benefits from the lost level are immediately removed: hit points, spell slots, abilities, etc.
- The character’s XP total drops to the midpoint of the lower level.
- A 1st-level character hit by energy drain is killed outright.

### Fear

An overwhelming sense of dread instilled by magic or supernatural terror.

Effects:

Target cannot approach source of fear.

Disadvantage on all rolls while in line of sight of the source.

## Paralysis

A condition where the character cannot act due to magical or physiological causes.

Effects:

- All melee attacks against the paralyzed character are automatic critical hits.
- All non-melee attacks gain +4 to hit.
- All enemies have Advantage when attacking.
- The character cannot move or take actions.

## Petrification

An effect that turns the character to stone over time.

Effects:

Target must make a Constitution DC10 save each round when exposed.

- On first failure: Restrained.
- On second failure: Fully petrified.

## Poison

A common hazard found in venomous creatures, traps, and enchanted weapons.

Effects:

The target must make a Constitution ability save (DC based on the poison’s strength or source).

- On failure: The full effect is applied, often instant death, paralysis, or ongoing damage.
- On success: The target may suffer reduced or no effects, depending on the poison.

Not all poisons are fatal. Some cause hallucinations, debilitate abilities, or inflict lingering harm.

For specific poisons and how to treat them, see Appendix C: Poisons and Antidotes.

### Sleep

A magical unconsciousness.

Effects:

- Target falls unconscious.
- Automatically fails all checks.
- May be killed without resistance.

## Condition Highlights

Many combat effects can impose conditions on characters. Below are some of the most common, with quick reference rules:

### Blinded

Can’t make ranged attacks; all enemies have +10 AC and Advantage against you.

Disadvantage on Perception checks and attack rolls that rely on sight.

### Prone

-2 to your attack rolls while prone.

Enemies have Advantage on melee attacks against you.

You gain +2 AC vs ranged attacks (e.g., greater than 5 feet unless weapon has reach).

Move at half speed; takes a full round to stand unless aided.

### Invisible

Cannot be targeted by ranged attacks.

+10 AC; Advantage on attacks; cannot be surprised.

### Sleeping Opponents

- A sleeping creature is helpless and cannot take actions or reactions.
- Characters may attempt to tie up a sleeping opponent without waking them.
- Make a Wisdom Save (DC 10) to avoid disturbing the sleeper.
- On failure, the creature wakes immediately and combat begins.
- A sleeping creature can be automatically killed with a melee attack if the attacker is not interrupted and can reach them.

DM Discretion: Magical sleep, enchantments, or supernatural sleep may require higher DCs or special methods to bypass.

(For a full list of all conditions and how to remove them, see Player Conditions.)

# Environment Modifiers

By considering the environment and how it affects combat, players and DMs can add an extra level of strategy and depth to their battles.

## Terrain

The battlefield is more than just flat ground. Varied terrain can dramatically impact the flow of combat, offering strategic advantages and disadvantages to both attackers and defenders. From the sucking mud of swamps to the treacherous slopes of mountains, the ground itself can become an ally or a foe.

Understanding the terrain and using it to your advantage is a key element of tactical combat.

- **Difficult:** Whenever anyone moves through difficult terrain they are affected by the Slow Condition (Movement is reduced to 1/2. You can only attack every other round.)
- **Unstable:** Whenever anyone moves across unstable terrain, anyone moving through this terrain must make a DC 8 Dexterity save at the start of their turn. On a failed save, a creature get the Prone Condition.
- **Elevated:** Ranged attackers on higher ground (at least 10 feet higher than their target) have Advantage on ranged attack rolls
- **Narrow:** The area is only wide enough for creatures to move in single file. This means only the creature in front can make melee attacks against enemies in the passage. Ranged attacks can still be made normally.
- **Steep:** The incline is so steep that climbing is required to move across it. Movement speed is halved, and moving uphill must make a Climbing or Strength check (DC 10) at the start of their turn. On a failed save, they fall taking 1d6 damage per 10’ fallen, cumulative (eg: +2d6 for the second 10 feet fallen, +3d6 for the third 10 feet, etc.)

## Obstacles as Cover

The battlefield is littered with obstacles that can be used for strategic advantage. These obstacles can provide varying degrees of cover, impacting the effectiveness of attacks against characters.

**Degrees of Cover:**

**No Cover (0%):** Open ground with no obstacles. Characters have their normal Armor Class (AC).

**Half Cover (50%):** Provides a +2 bonus to AC. Examples:

- Chest-high walls or fences
- Large objects like boulders or overturned furniture
- The back of a friendly creature (consenting of course!)

**Three-Quarter Cover (75%):** Provides a +4 bonus to AC. Examples:

- Full cover behind a waist-high wall or barricade
- Narrow openings like doorways or windows (if positioned correctly)
- The inside of a destroyed vehicle (depending on size and damage)

**Full Cover (100%):** A character is completely concealed from an attacker's line of sight. They cannot be targeted by an attack or spell, although some area-effect spells might still reach them. Examples:

- Completely enclosed spaces (behind a closed door, inside a portcullis)
- The other side of a thick wall or pillar

## Important Considerations:

**Line of Sight:** A character only gets the cover bonus if the attacker doesn't have a clear line of sight to them. Leaning out from cover to attack removes the bonus for that round.

**Size and Shape of Obstacles:** The size and shape of an obstacle determine how much cover it offers. A half-wall might only provide half cover, while a large overturned cart could provide three-quarter cover. This will be declaired by the DM.

**Destructible Obstacles:** Some obstacles, like wooden doors or barricades, can be destroyed with enough force. This adds a tactical layer, as players might choose to destroy cover for better attack angles.

## Optional Rules:

**Peeking Over Cover:** Characters can choose to peek over cover to make an attack. This grants disadvantage on the attack roll but allows them to maintain some cover bonus.

**Difficult Obstacles:** Moving through some obstacles, like thick brush or debris, might impose a movement penalty.

# Light and Visibility

Light and visibility play a crucial role in any adventurer’s life. From navigating treacherous dungeons to outsmarting foes in the dead of night, understanding how light interacts with the environment is key to success. This system explores the different light levels and visibility conditions, their impact on various checks, and how they can be manipulated to gain the upper hand in any situation.

### Light Levels

- **Normal Light:** This is the standard lighting condition, similar to a bright day or a well-lit room. No penalties apply to vision or checks.
- **Low Light:** This includes dim light conditions like dusk, dawn, or a torch-lit corridor. Creatures with darkvision have normal vision, others have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.
- **Darkness:** This is complete darkness, with no natural light source. Creatures without darkvision have the Blinded condition. Creatures with darkvision can see normally in darkness.
- **Magical Darkness:** This functions similarly to regular darkness, but it effects darkvision and it cannot be dispelled by non-magical light sources.

### Visibility

- **Clear:** This is the standard visibility condition where there are no obstructions to sight. Players can see clearly up to their movement value.
- **Obscured:** This represents situations where vision is impaired by fog, smoke, heavy rain, or magical effects. Creatures in obscured areas have disadvantage on any checks that rely on sight including ranged attacks, visibility is reduced to 1/2 of the normal distance.

# Complete Combat Example

The party slogs through the swamp, the oppressive silence broken only by the squelch of their boots in the mud. A thick fog blankets the area, obscuring their vision beyond a few feet (obscured visibility), making it nearly impossible to spot hidden dangers.

Suddenly, a guttural shriek pierces the air, followed by a flurry of arrows raining down from above. The party looks up in shock to see a band of goblins cackling from the branches of gnarled cypress trees lining the swamp path. The elevated position (advantage on ranged attacks for goblins) gives them a clear view of the party struggling through the fog. The goblins, using the swamp and the fog as their allies, have cleverly positioned themselves in the trees (half cover from return fire), while the party stumbles through the

mud, their boots sinking with every step in the unstable ground makes it difficult to maintain their footing, forcing them to make Dexterity saves to avoid falling prone.

## Combat Example: Three Rounds

Setting: Two players (Elira, a 4th-level Wizard; and Thalen, a 4th-level Cavalier) encounter four goblins in a ruined watchtower. The area is dimly lit by torchlight, with rubble and fallen beams providing half cover and unstable terrain.
Enemies:

- 2 Goblin Archers (shortbows, perched on ruined scaffolding)
- 2 Goblin Skirmishers (hand axes, ground level)

## Round 1: Ambush in the Ruins

**Surprise Check:** The goblins succeed in Stealth against Elira's Notice. The party is surprised.

**Initiative:** Goblins (rolled as a group): 15, Elira: 12, Thalen: 9, Squire: 7

Goblins act first.

Goblin Archer A: Takes a shot at Elira (Called Shot: Head). Rolls 7 + 2 = 9. Misses.

Goblin Archer B: Fires at Thalen. Rolls 12 + 2 = 14. Misses (Thalen AC 16).

Goblin Skirmisher A: Charges Thalen with a yell. Rolls 18 + 3 = 21. Hit! Damage: 1d6+1 = 4.

Goblin Skirmisher B: Charges the squire. Rolls 9 + 3 = 12. Misses (Squire AC 13).
Elira (Surprised): No action this round. Thalen: Declares "I move to engage Goblin Skirmisher A and attack." Rolls 14 + 4 = 18. Hit! Damage: Longsword 1d8+2 = 6. Squire: Attacks Goblin Skirmisher B. Rolls 16 + 1 = 17. Hit! Damage: 1d8 = 5.

**Morale Check:** Goblin Skirmisher A drops to 2 HP (below 50%). Rolls 7 + 0 = 7. Fails. Becomes Broken (will attempt to flee next round).

## Round 1 Summary:

Goblins: 1 wounded and broken, 1 wounded

Party: Thalen slightly wounded

Elira regains composure, preparing for retaliation

## Round 2: Turning the Tide

**Declare Actions:**

Elira: Casts Burning Ray at both archers

Thalen: Finishes Skirmisher A

Squire: Attacks Skirmisher B

Goblins: Archer A tries Called Shot again, Archer B fires at squire, Skirmisher A flees, Skirmisher B attacks Thalen

**Initiative Re-Roll:**

Goblins: 13, Elira: 16, Thalen: 14, Squire: 11

Elira: Casts Burning Ray. Rolls 17 and 13 for attack rolls against Archer A and B. Hits both. Damage: 2d6 = 8 and 5. Both archers are burned, reeling.

Thalen: Finishes Skirmisher A. Rolls 11 + 4 = 15. Hit. Damage: 1d8+2 = 6. Kills.

Goblins:

Archer A: Tries Called Shot (Head) on Elira again. Rolls 8 + 2 – 5 (called shot) = 5. Misses.

Archer B: Fires at squire. Rolls 15 + 2 = 17. Hit. Damage: 1d6 = 3. Squire at 7 HP.

Skirmisher A: Dead.

Skirmisher B: Attacks Thalen. Rolls 17 + 3 = 20. Hit. Damage: 1d6+1 = 6.

Squire: Attacks Skirmisher B. Rolls 19 + 1 = 20. Hit! Damage: 1d8 = 7. Skirmisher B now at 1 HP.

**Morale Check:** Archer A (5 HP remaining) rolls 6 + 0 = 6. Fails. Becomes Broken.

## Round 2 Summary:

Goblins: 1 dead, 1 broken, 1 archer badly burned, 1 melee goblin at 1 HP

Party: Squire lightly wounded, Thalen further wounded

## Round 3: Victory

**Declare Actions:**

Elira: Firebolt at Archer B

Thalen: Charges Skirmisher B

Squire: Finishes off Skirmisher B if needed

Goblins: Archer A attempts to flee, Archer B makes final shot

**Initiative:**

Elira: 17, Thalen: 11, Goblins: 10, Squire: 9

Elira: Casts Firebolt at Archer B. Rolls 13 + 3 = 16. Hit. Damage: 1d10 = 9. Archer B collapses in flame.

Thalen: Moves to Skirmisher B and attacks. Rolls 12 + 4 = 16. Hit. Damage: 1d8+2 = 8. Skirmisher B is slain.

Goblin Archer A: Broken. Attempts to flee. Runs to edge of scaffolding.

Squire: Grabs a rock and throws at fleeing Archer A. Rolls 16. Hit! Damage: Improvised (1d4) = 3. Goblin

Archer A falls off the platform and lands with a crack. Dead.

## Round 3 Summary:

All goblins dead

Elira unscathed, Thalen wounded but standing, squire proud and victorious