

Magic Item Creation for the Busy Wizard

New guidelines on creating balanced magic
items for your D&D 5th edition game



By Mark Stout



MAGIC ITEM CREATION

FOR THE BUSY WIZARD

*NEW GUIDELINES ON CREATING BALANCED MAGIC
ITEMS FOR YOUR D&D 5TH EDITION GAME.*

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What's in this product?

This product contains a system of guidelines for producing magic items that are balanced for a particular rarity.

The system was created by breaking down the mechanical effects of magic items presented in the Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide. The individual properties were classified into several categories, and then tested to see if items could be recreated from those categorized properties. Many items in the **DMG** can be recreated using these guidelines, but some items don't conform to the system, usually being rated at a lower rarity than their properties suggest.

Despite some inconsistencies, I feel this is a useful tool for all Dungeon Masters who wish to create new and unique items without producing ones that are underpowered or overpowered.

How did it come about?

The idea for this product came about from my desire to have a mechanically sound way to measure the power, and thus rarity, of a magic item. Perusal of the existing items in the **DMG** can be a somewhat frustrating affair, as items will demonstrate different rarities even if they **perform the exact same function**.

Some examples of this problem can be seen in various items that provide resistance to one damage type. The *ring of cold resistance* is a Rare magical item. Yet the *ring of warmth*, which provides cold resistance plus resistance to environmental cold, is an Uncommon item. The *boots of the winterlands* provide cold resistance, along with two other benefits, and is also rated as Uncommon. These are the sorts of inconsistencies that led me to develop these guidelines.

I keep using the word 'guidelines' because these rules are exactly that - guidelines. They are meant to help you make new magic items that are balanced, not become a noose to hang yourself with. Do let these guidelines help you. Don't let them hold your creativity back.

So how does this work?

All the magical properties - the mechanical game effects - have been sorted into several categories: Minor Properties, Major Properties, and properties that count as 2, 3, or even 4 Major Properties.

The rarity is determined by how many Major Properties an item has. Minor properties don't affect the rarity, but should be limited as noted below. Select the properties you want, note the amount of major properties, and consult the chart below to see what the rarity will be.

- **Common:** 1 Minor property
- **Uncommon:** 1 Major property, 1 minor property
- **Rare:** 2 Major properties, 1-2 minor properties
- **Very Rare:** 3 Major properties, 1-2 minor properties
- **Legendary:** 4+ Major properties, 1-3 minor properties

Some properties are obviously intended for one kind of item. Other properties can be used with any type of item. Common sense is your best friend in making that determination.

Minor Properties

- Shed light as a torch or lantern.
- Know which direction is north.
- Know depth underground.
- Know direction of nearest exit to surface when underground.
- Gain a +2 bonus to initiative.
- Gain knowledge of 1 language while carrying the item.
- Item glows faintly when 1 chosen enemy (orcs, dragons) is within 120 feet.
- Unbreakable. Must be destroyed by special means.
- Change Shape. This could be a dagger that changes to a shortsword, or a hand axe that changes to a hammer.
- Illusionary Appearance. The item can appear as another item.
- Gain an armor or weapon proficiency while in possession of, or wearing, the item.
- Gain advantage on saves to resist extremely hot or cold environments.
- Cast a cantrip at will.
- Spend a bonus action to return this thrown weapon to your hand after you throw it.

Major Properties (1)

The following properties count as 1 Major Property.

- +1 bonus to a weapon or shield.
- +1 bonus to a suit of armor. **NOTE:** The first +1 bonus to armor counts as 2 Major properties, but each subsequent +1 bonus counts as 1 Major property.
- +1 AC from a non-armor item.
- +1 bonus to all saving throws.
- +1d6 typed damage on each hit with the weapon. Typed means pick a damage type: fire, cold, etc.
- +2d6 weapon damage on each hit versus a specific foe, A.K.A. a *Bane* weapon. Foe may be a category like giants or dragons. Humanoids must be a specific race.
- Weapon inflicts an extra 7 weapon damage on a roll of natural 20.
- Wielder can swap weapon bonus to and from attack bonus and AC.
- Weapon inflicts 1d4 typed damage on target that continues until stopped. Each hit adds another 1d4. Usually stopped by a Con saving throw of 10-18 based on final rarity.
- Weapon inflicts maximum damage on a hit. A longsword (1d8) would do 8 + modifiers damage.
- Damage inflicted by the weapon can't be healed by magic, including regeneration.
- Weapon wielder can spend a bonus action to make one attack.
- After making a ranged attack with this thrown weapon, it returns to your hand.

Major Properties (1)

The following properties count as 1 Major Property.

- Weapon can inflict 4d6 typed damage (save for half) once per day on a hit.
- Gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls **or** damage rolls with one particular type of weapon (bows, slings, etc).
- Weapon produces a poison that deals 2d10 poison damage and poisoned condition on the next hit (save for half and no poisoned) once per day.
- Gain advantage on your next attack roll, once per day.
- Can use your reaction to make one attack against a foe that hit you.
- Armor lets wearer ignore Stealth and Strength penalties.
- Armor turns critical hits on wearer into normal hits.
- You can use your reaction to reduce damage from a hit by 1d10 + ability modifier.
- Gain advantage on one saving throw in one particular instance - Con save against poison, Dex save to avoid traps, Str save to resist being shoved, etc.
- Gain immunity to one of the following conditions: blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, or poisoned.
- Gain advantage on initiative checks.
- Gain a +5 bonus to up to two specific skill checks. Ex: Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb and swim.
- Gain advantage on one skill check. Example: On Dexterity (Stealth) checks when hiding or sneaking.
- Gain a +1 bonus to all ability checks, but not attack rolls or saving throws.
- You can reroll one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw once per day. You must keep the second result.
- Item sets one ability score to 19. Doesn't work if ability score is already 19 or higher.
- Gain a swim speed equal to your walking speed.
- Gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.
- Gain a flying speed equal to your walking speed, once per day for up to 4 hours.
- Gain the spider climb ability.
- Gain a speed of 30 feet that can't be reduced by armor or encumbrance. Doesn't help if speed already higher.
- Double your speed for up to 10 minutes per day, multiple uses possible.
- Gain the ability to walk on one substance you normally can't walk on - water, lava, etc.
- Gain water breathing when underwater, operates continuously.
- Gain the ability to see invisible people and objects, operates continuously.
- Gain darkvision of 60 feet, or increase your darkvision range by 60 feet if you already have it.
- Item has extradimensional storage of large capacity.
- Wearer can't be found with divination magic.
- Can cast a 1st level utility spell (no offensive, defensive, or healing spells) on yourself only, at will. Examples *comprehend languages, jump, unseen servant*.
- Can cast a 2nd level spell once per day.
- Can cast a 1st or 2nd level spell(s) by spending charges, item has 3-7 charges (rechargeable) or 5-12 charges (non-rechargeable/expendable).

Major Properties (2)

The following properties count as 2 Major Properties.

- +2 bonus to a weapon or shield.
- First +1 bonus to a suit of armor. **See note under 1 Major Property list.**
- Weapon ignores damage resistance of the type it inflicts.
- Gain resistance to one damage type.
- Gain resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
- +2 AC from a non-armor item.
- +2d6 typed damage on each hit with the weapon. Typed means pick a damage type: fire, cold, etc.
- Weapon inflicts an extra 14 weapon damage on a roll of natural 20.
- Weapon inflicts an extra 10 typed damage on a roll of natural 20, and has an additional effect. Example: Target takes 10 necrotic damage and you gain 10 temporary hit points, or target takes 10 poison damage and must make a Con save or be poisoned for 1 minute.
- +3d6 weapon damage on each hit versus a specific foe.
- +2d6 weapon damage on each hit versus a specific foe, and has an additional effect. Example: Target takes an extra 2d6 damage and must succeed on a Str save or be knocked prone.
- When a natural 20 is rolled, the weapon forces target to make a DC 15 Con saving throw or die.
- Displacement effect causes foes to have disadvantage on their attack rolls against you until you take damage.
- You gain advantage on saving throws against spells.
- You can automatically succeed on one saving throw by spending a charge, item has 3 charges. Example: Spend a charge to succeed on a Dexterity save.
- When you make a saving throw against a spell and roll a natural 20, you reflect the spell on the caster and suffer no effects from it.
- Automatically make one ability check once per day.
- Item sets one ability score to 21. Doesn't work if ability score is already 21 or higher.
- You gain a fly speed of 60 feet for up to 1 hour per day.
- While attuned to the item, you ignore difficult terrain, can't have your movement reduced, and can't be paralyzed or restrained.
- You gain the benefits of a *feather fall* spell whenever you fall.
- You can cast a 2nd level spell (no offensive, defensive, or healing spells) on yourself only, at will. Examples: *levitate, misty step, or alter self*.
- You can cast a 3rd to 5th level spell once per day.
- You can cast a variety of spells from 1st to 5th level, paying 1 charge per spell level, item has 7-10 charges, rechargeable.
- Can cast a 3rd or 4th level spell for 1 charge each, non-rechargeable.
- Can cast a 3rd or 4th level spell for 1 charge, increasing charges upgrade spell, item has 7 charges, rechargeable.
- Can cast up to a 6th level spell one time, this destroys the item.

Major Properties (3)

The following properties count as 3 Major Properties.

- +3 bonus to a weapon or shield.
- +2 bonus to a suit of armor.
- Shield or weapon is animated, defending for 1 minute or attacking once as a bonus action for 4 rounds.
- Gain immunity to one damage type.
- Gain advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects.
- Gain resistance to spell damage.
- Gain regeneration of 1d6 hit points every 10 minutes. A missing body part regrows in 1d6+1 days.
- Item sets one ability score to 23 or 25. Doesn't work if ability score is already higher.
- Gain a permanent +2 bonus to one ability score, or a +2 bonus while possessing or wearing the item. This increases your maximum score by the same amount.
- You can cast a 7th or 8th level spell one time, this destroys the item.
- You can cast a 5th or 6th level spell for 1 charge each, non-rechargeable.

Major Properties (4)

The following properties count as 4 Major Properties.

- +3 bonus to a suit of armor.
- You can cast a 7th to 9th level spell once per day.
- Item sets one ability score to 27 or 29. Doesn't work if ability score is already higher.

More on Charged Items

Charged items come in three varieties.

1. Items that recharge once per day at a set time (dawn, dusk, midnight). When the last charge is spent, there is a 1 in 20 chance (1 on a d20 roll) that the item is destroyed.
2. Items that recharge once per day at a set time (dawn, dusk, midnight). These items aren't destroyed by spending the last charge.
3. Items that don't recharge. When the last charge is expended, the item loses that function permanently, becomes non-magical, or is destroyed.

A rechargeable item generally recharges a random amount of charges based on a die roll (or roll with a modifier). When deciding on a recharge die and modifier, both should allow for a complete restoration of charges on a maximum die result, but still retain a good variance.

An example of this is with the *wand of magic missiles*. It has 7 charges, and regains 1d6+1 charges at dawn. Using a d6 die with a +1 modifier gives the roll a wide variance (2-7) while allowing for a maximum roll to fully replenish the charges. The *staff of curing* has 10 charges, and regains 1d6+4 (5-10) charges at dawn.

Charged Items - type 1

The first category of charged items, items that could be destroyed when the last charge is expended, typically covers

wands, staves, and one rod. Note that not all of them have charges - of the rods, only one does. Those that do have charges tend to follow these rules.

Wands typically have 3 or 7 charges. If the wand allows the casting of one spell, it will cost 1 charge to cast that spell. If the spell is one that can be cast at a higher level for additional effect, more than 1 charge can be spent to increase the casting level. Example: A wand of fireballs casts the *fireball* spell at 3rd level for 1 charge. Using 2 charges casts the spell at 4th level. If the wand allows the casting of more than one spell, the charge cost will be the lowest level of the spell, and no extra charges can be spent to increase the level. Example: A wand of binding can cast *hold person* for 2 charges or *hold monster* for 5 charges.

Staves that use charges to cast spells tend to have 10 charges. The *staff of power* and *staff of the magi* are exceptions. They allow the casting of multiple spells, so the charge cost to cast the spell is the spell's base level.

Charged Items - type 2

The second category of charged items is those that aren't destroyed by expending the last charge. Any item that isn't a potion, scroll, wand, or staff that has charges falls under this heading.

Wondrous items and rings with charges have examples in the DMG - ring of evasion, medallion of thoughts, and eyes of charming. These items have 3-10 charges, and typically use 1 charge to cast spells or activate their effects. Single spell or effect items, like the eyes of charming and ring of evasion, tend to have 3 charges and replenish 1d3 charges once per day. Multiple spell or effect items, like the ring of shooting stars, usually have 6-10 charges, with charge costs equal to the spell level or effect produced.

You aren't restricted to using charges on rings and wondrous items. Weapons, armor, and shields can all have charged effects or spells, either alongside a standard "plus" bonus, or in lieu of it.

Charged Items - type 3

These charged items don't recharge. When the last charge is expended, one of three things happens, depending on the type of item it is.

- The item loses the charged function permanently (death effect of a nine lives stealer, wishes of a luck blade).
- The item becomes non-magical (ring of 3 wishes, helm of brilliance).
- The item is destroyed (scarab of protection, gem of brightness).

Items in the first two points above tend to have 1 to 9 charges, determined randomly, and use 1 charge per activation. The more powerful the effect, the less charges the item has.

Items in the third point have a larger number of charges, anywhere from 12 to 50. As above, powerful effects will have less charges, or if the item has multiple effects, the more powerful effects will require the expenditure of multiple charges, like the gem of brightness.

Attunement

So where does attunement fit in with this system? It has nothing to do with determining the rarity of a magical item. Rather it is a restriction of sorts, a way to ensure that characters aren't walking around festooned with magical items like a Christmas tree with ornaments.

Certain magical items have attunement as a requirement to use the item, or have access to the item's special properties. Attunement seems to be universal among the most powerful magic items, with a few notable exceptions. It also seems to be almost omnipresent on items that allow the casting of multiple spells, and those that provide a constant bonus to the character in the form of ability checks, saving throws, AC, resistances, immunities, or other continuous magical effects.

Some types of items **never** require attunement. These include:

- Potions, elixirs, and oils
- Scrolls
- Dusts and powders
- Ointments
- Bags with beans, fuzzy objects, etc
- Beads that release a spell or effect when thrown
- Weapons, armor, or shields that are +1 to +3 only, with no other abilities
- Ammunition
- Items whose sole function is extradimensional storage
- Limited use items whose sole function is to summon creatures
- Flying devices that are ridden on
- Vehicles and buildings
- Item that produces a 1st or 2nd level spell once per day as its sole function
- Item designed to be placed onto another creature (iron bands, dimensional shackles)
- Bane weapons with no other abilities except the bane ability and a bonus
- Armor whose magic is on the armor, not the wearer (adamantine armor, dwarven plate, mithral armor)
- Figurines that become a monster
- Bottles and flasks that hold things
- Items designed for mounts
- One-use items that grant a permanent ability score increase (manuals, books, and tomes)

Some types of items **always** require attunement. These include:

- Staffs, rods, and wands (except wands that produce only one 1st level spell or effect)
- Items which increase an ability score while they are being worn.
- Sentient items
- Artifacts

As for any item not covered on the two lists above, it's your choice as DM. Generally, an item that bestows a continuous effect on the character, allows the casting of multiple spells, or conveys multiple benefits, should require attunement. Powerful items of Very Rare to Legendary rarity should always require attunement.

Minor and Major Items

Xanathar's Guide to Everything (XGE) showed the split between **Minor** and **Major** magical items. If you look at the minor magic item tables by rarity (**XGE 140-142**), you'll see that all the magic items that fall into the minor category (with the exception of several Common items) are all items that **do not require attunement**. These items are mostly **consumable** or **expendable** items, or **permanent items that don't have a direct combat usage** (storage, transport, non-flying movement).

You can determine whether your magical item is minor or major by using the above notes, as well as the **XGE** tables as a guide.

Example Builds

In this section, iconic and new magic items have been built to demonstrate the ease and versatility of the system. You'll see which iconic items follow the guidelines, and which do not.

Flame Tongue

- +2d6 fire damage on a hit - 2 Major properties.
- Sheds light - 1 Minor property.

Two Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Rare item. This matches the DMG entry.

Frost Brand

- +1d6 cold damage on a hit - 1 Major property.
- Gain cold resistance - 2 Major properties.
- Sheds light - 1 Minor property.
- Extinguish flames - 1 Minor property.

Three Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Very Rare item. This matches the DMG entry.

Mace of Disruption

- +2d6 radiant damage to undead or fiend on a hit, and it must save or be destroyed if it has 25 or less hit points - 2 Major.
- Sheds light - 1 Minor.

Two Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Rare item. This matches the DMG entry.

Ring of Warmth

- Gain cold resistance - 2 Major.
- Advantage on saves against cold environment - 1 Minor.

Two Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Rare item. This **doesn't** match the DMG entry of Uncommon.

Boots of Elvenkind

- Gain advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks - 1 Major.

One Major property makes an Uncommon item. This matches the DMG entry.

Vicious Weapon

- Weapon inflicts an extra 7 weapon damage on a roll of natural 20 - 1 Major.

One Major property makes an Uncommon item. This **doesn't** match the DMG entry of Rare.

Tome of Clear Thought

- Gain a permanent +2 bonus to your Intelligence score. This increases your maximum score by the same amount - 3 Major.

Three Major properties make a Very Rare item. This matches the DMG entry.

Belt of Dwarvenkind

- Gain +2 bonus to Con while wearing belt - 2 Major (since it doesn't increase maximum score).
- Advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks with dwarves - 1 Major.
- Gain dwarven resistance to poison, advantage on poison saves, darkvision, and language 3 Major and 1 Minor.

Six Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Legendary item. This **doesn't** match the DMG entry of Rare.

New Items

Sword of the Arctic Wastes

Weapon (longsword), rare (requires attunement)

- +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls - 1 Major.
- +1d6 cold damage on a hit - 1 Major.
- As a bonus action, you can change it from a longsword to a war pick - 1 Minor.

Two Major properties and 1 Minor property make a Rare item.

Hawkwing Armor

Armor (leather), very rare (requires attunement)

- +1 bonus to AC - 2 Major.
- You can say a command word as an action to make the armor sprout wings. You gain a flying speed equal to your walking speed. You can dismiss the wings with a bonus action. You can use the wings a total of 4 hours per day - 1 Major.

Three Major properties make a Very Rare item.

Storm Shield

Armor (shield), rare (requires attunement)

- The shield has 3 charges. You can use your reaction when you've been struck by a foe within 60 feet to expend 1 charge to cast a *hellish rebuke* spell that inflicts lightning damage. The shield regains 1d3 charges at dawn - 1 Major.
- +1 bonus to AC - 1 Major.

Two Major properties make a Rare item.

Bag of Slime Balls

Wondrous item, uncommon

- Bag contains 1d4+4 spongy balls that feel slick to the touch. You can throw the ball up to 60 feet as an action. When it lands, it creates the effect of a *grease* spell. Targets in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone. Any creature entering the area or ending its turn there must make the Dexterity saving throw. The slippery area remains for 1 minute. - 1 Major property.

One Major property makes this an Uncommon item.

Assassin's Blade

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

- +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls - 1 Major.
- +1d6 piercing damage on a hit - 1 Major.
- Illusionary Appearance. The dagger can be made to appear as any object of equivalent size - 1 Minor.

Two Major and 1 Minor properties make this a Rare item.