



Elminster's Guide to Solo Adventuring

**Complete mechanics and theory for playing
standard adventures, alone. In the Dungeons and
Dragons 5th edition world.**



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*As dusk came down on the dusty road, a wolf howled somewhere away to the north. The call was answered from near at hand, but the lone rider showed no fear. Her calm would have raised the eyebrows of the hardened knights who dared ride this road only in large, well-armed patrols-and their wary surprise would not have ended there. The lady rode easily, a long cloak swirling around her, time and again flapping around her hips and hampering her sword arm. Only a fool would allow such a thing-but this tall, lean lady rode the perilous road without even a sword at her hip. A patrol of knights would have judged her either a madwoman or a sorceress and reached for their blades accordingly. They'd not have been wrong.
(Elminster. The making of a mage by Ed Greenwood)*

Elminster's Guide to Solo adventuring.

Well met adventurer. So, you're itching to loot the nearest dungeon or visit a far-flung city but your party totals just one, you and there's no Dungeon Master this side of Waterdeep willing to guide you. Fear not The Continent of Faerun is still open for you to explore but watch your step, adventuring alone is no less perilous, you have been warned!

What this is.

This is a complete set of very familiar mechanics to allow you to adventure using any official publication or community content made adventure for 5th edition Dungeons and Dragons, without other party members or a Dungeon Master.

What this is not.

The answer to world peace, a replacement for playing with a bunch of your Friends, an excuse to never leave your home or an automated AI. (You still need to use your brain box.) So, without further ado, venture forth.

Playing in the world of Dungeons and Dragons fifth edition requires two roles, that of the Dungeon Master and player character. Both of which need a tweak to be successful for a solo outing. Then there's the adventure itself. Made up of three principles or pillars. Exploration, Social interaction, and Combat. To play an adventure alone we need a way to interact with the game world within these boundaries. This is what we will deal with first.

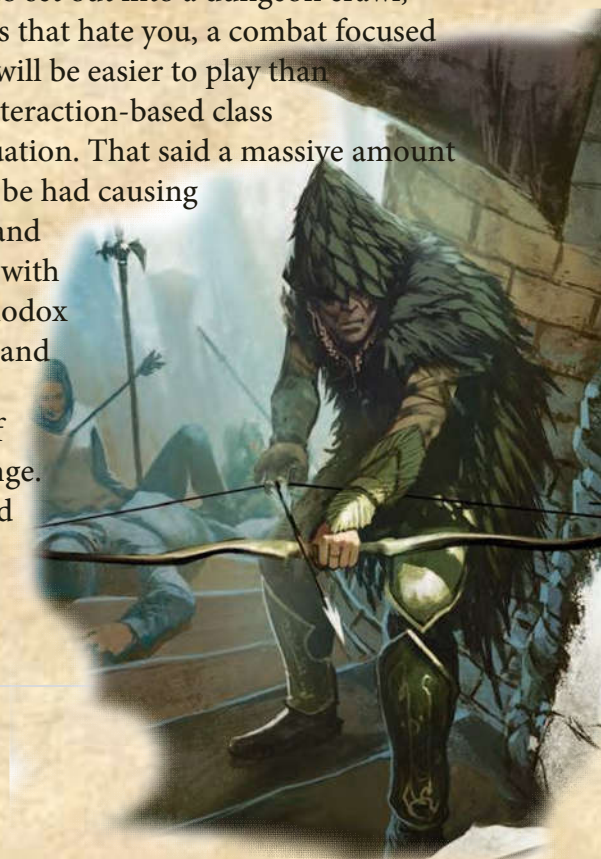
What you need.

An open mind and honesty with yourself. There is a risk of being tempted to meta game since you're taking on the role of both player and DM. It's really import that you can play the part of an NPC, the DM and

your character honestly, in a way in which, to the best of your knowledge they would behave in that situation. This may conflict with how you prefer them to behave. Some people will find this easier than others. Two things that can help are firstly, having a piece of note paper to write down the information your character has gained during the adventure. This will massively help when using the decision charts in game and will prevent accidental meta gaming, by confusing what you have been told, with what you as an overseer know. Second is an old physiology trick. Have one chair or hat to sit on or wear when you're the player character and a different chair or hat to sit on or wear when you're making decisions on behalf of an NPC (non-player character). This will sound funny at first but can help those that find perspective taking difficult.

First things first.

Choose your adventure. Whilst any adventure can be played with any race/class combo. It's fair to say that different character roles have different strengths and weakness. As a group these become largely unimportant, but it is a consideration, when it's just you! I'm not going to say to you, don't play XY or Z character I'm saying, if you want to set out into a dungeon crawl, full of Orcs that hate you, a combat focused class type will be easier to play than a social interaction-based class in that situation. That said a massive amount of fun can be had causing mayhem and confusion with an unorthodox approach and for some, it's part of the challenge. The second important thing is: DO NOT



READ THE ADVENTURE FIRST. It goes without saying you want a surprise, right? Just start at chapter one and read as you play. Sooner or later you will get to a point where you will want to do something, talk to someone or fight something. This is when the decision charts take over, if you want them too. Follow the questions on them, answer honestly, then roll against the generated DC using your character sheet stats as normal. The dice will tell you if you've been successful or not or how the NPC reacted to you. Resolve the situation as directed in the adventure or by following the guidance below then move on.

1st Pillar, Exploration.

Sooner or later you will come across an aspect of the environment you will want to interact with. Usually the DM will sort out the details and the chance of being successful. But this is now down to you! Often the adventure itself will state a DC for doing a certain task. Leaping over a pit or picking a lock for example. Resolve those as directed. But what if you want to do something unscripted or unpredictable? Like climb the outside of the tower. Here's where the Exploration decision chart comes in. It is used for any activity that involves manipulating the environment or an inanimate object in some way to complete the activity.

You will see there are three questions. Be as honest as you can when answering!

- 1) Looking at the environmental factors*
Is the outcome 50/50, more or less than 50/50 chance of success?
- 2) Do you have anything in your possession or back story that might help?
- 3) Does the core stat* relating to this task have a positive or negative modifier? (0 is a positive)

Follow the answer paths from each question to reach the appropriate DC. Roll using the appropriate skill. (A list of skills and their uses is in the General tips and tricks section if you're unsure). Resolve the task whether successful or not and continue on your way.

*Environmental factors are anything not directly relating to the character.

* Core stats i.e. Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma.

Something to consider.

You should not try to do the same thing again when unsuccessful, without changing some aspect of how you intend to do it.

Example.

Arriving at the base of a solitary tower, you decide the fastest way to the top is to climb the outside and enter through the open window. You refer to the Exploration chart. Question 1) There is vegetation growing up the outside and by the looks of it rough masonry work that looks like places to hold on as you climb. So, you say you have a better than 50/50 chance of making it. Question 2) you don't have any equipment or specific climbing experience. So, answer No. Question 3) You're using athletics to climb the tower and that's a +1 in strength. So, answer Yes.

Following the chart that gives this task a DC of 15. You roll 13 and so fail to find enough grip to scale the wall. Time to try a different approach.

Yes / No answers.

So how did we know the details about the tower? We used some simple yes / no questions first.

Simply roll a D6. 1,2,3 = No. 4,5,6 = Yes.

Does the tower have vegetation? Roll 5 = Yes

Is the upstairs window open? Roll 6 = Yes

Is there anything lying around that might

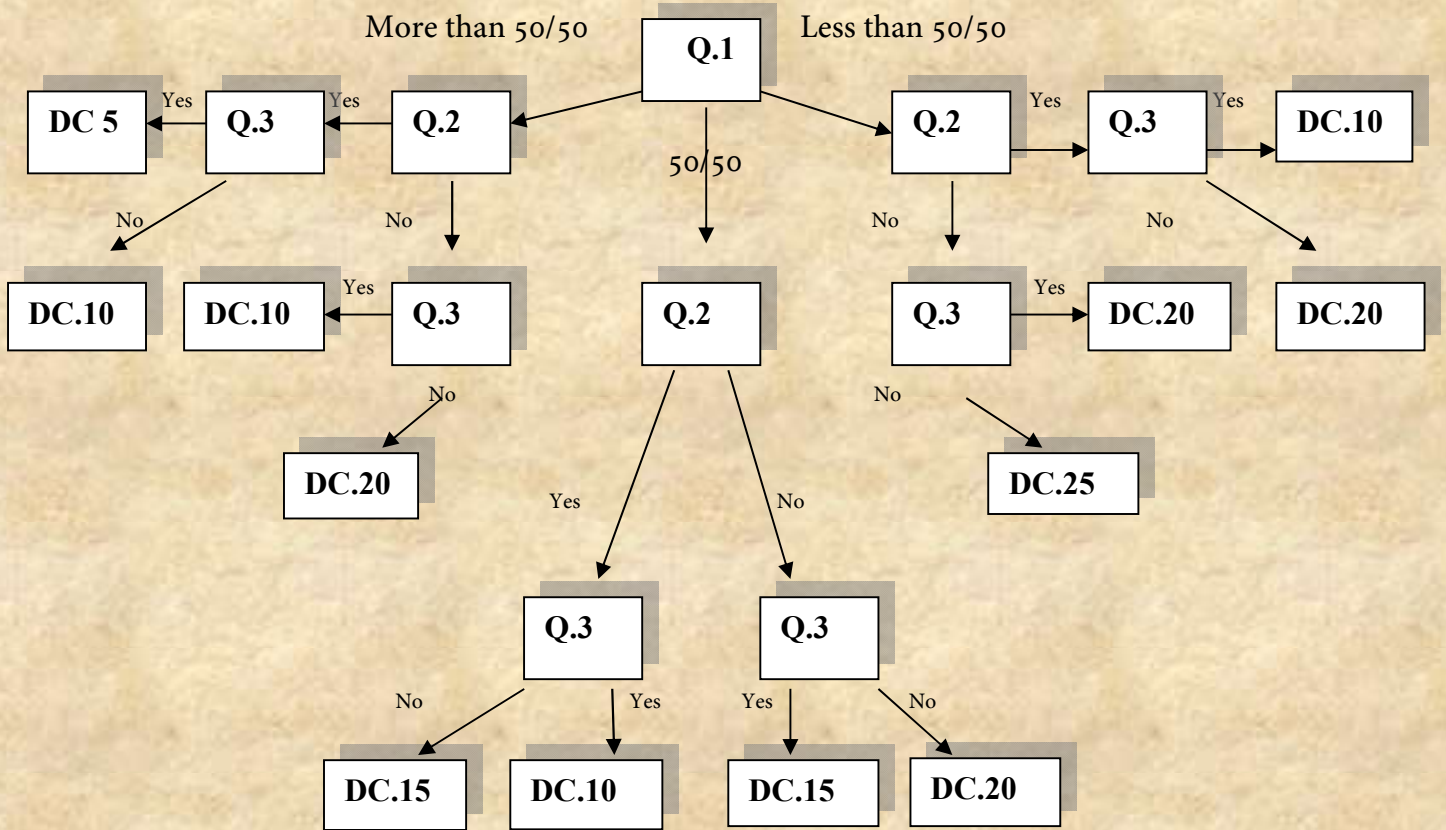
help me? Roll 2 = No

Do I get half way up and fall? Roll 3 = No.

And so on.



Exploration Chart



Questions

- Q.1** Looking at the environmental factors* is the outcome 50/50, more than 50/50 or less than a 50/50 chance of success?
- Q.2** Do you have anything in your possession or back story that might help?
- Q.3** Does the core stat* relating to this task have a positive or negative modifier? (0 is a positive)

Follow the answer paths from each question to reach the appropriate DC. Roll using the appropriate skill (a list of skills and there uses can be found at the back of this document if you're unsure). Resolve the task whether successful or not and continue on your way.

*Environmental factors are anything not directly relating to the character.

* Core stats i.e. Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma.

Task Difficulty	DC
Trivial	5
Easy	10
Moderate	15
Hard	20
Very Hard	25
Nearly Impossible	30



2nd Pillar, Social Interaction

Dealing with inanimate objects is one thing but dealing with other living, talking creatures is another. Now there's good news and bad news. The bad news is it's impossible to have a conversation with someone who's not there, unless it's late and the ale was off! But the good news is, it is possible to work out how a third person might interact with us and what decisions they may make. This would allow us to carry on with the adventure, collect information, meet interesting NPC's and ultimately still have fun in the D&D 5e universe. Once again, the adventure may well guide you in how NPCs act, their opinions on things and the player character. Always take this written guidance first and go from there. So, first things first. If you're simply looking for a positive or negative answer, a yes or no and its really 50/50 just roll a D6 as before. Then again you have the option of an opposed skill check. Persuasion/ Performance vs Wisdom. Deception/ Intimidation vs Intelligence. Or finally we can look at the Social interaction chart. Following the sequence as before, answering questions to get a target DC. Before following the chart, unless stated in the adventure already, we need to find out how the NPC views the player character. Use your common sense, what you know of the setting or adventure, stereotypes and what you've seen in fantasy media to help you. Still stuck? Roll a D6 1,2 = The NPC views you negatively. 3,4= the NPC has no opinion and is neutral towards you. 5,6= the NPC views you positively.

The Social interactions chart.

- 1) Does the character you want to interact with view you favourably?
- 2) Is there anything in your possession, recent events or back story that might help?
- 3) Does the core stat relating to this task have a positive or negative modifier? (0=Positive)

Things to consider

You may need to run this Q and A from the point of view of the NPC first, to gain a better understanding of how it feels towards a player character.

Honesty in answering the questions is very important.

Think about stereotypes. Everyone has a bias towards others whether good or bad. Often, we don't recognise it but nonetheless it's there, an unconscious bias. Does the NPC have an unconscious bias or obvious stereotype bias towards the character? Use the D6 to find out if you can't decide.

Some NPCs are quest givers or have game critical information. This will become apparent as you read that part of the adventure. When rolling the social checks against these, consider that a failed check rather than yielding no information, instead reveals the information at a cost. Maybe a bribe, or an agreement to share part of the profits or a bond to complete some kind of favour.

Example 1.

You enter a tavern with the intention of getting some information from the Barman. You use a D6 to determine he does like dwarfs (which you happen to be). You decide to do an opposed skill test, your



persuasion against his wisdom. You fail. The Barman not wanting to get in trouble says he really can't tell you anything. Not wanting to give up, you try a different approach using the Social encounters chart. Question 1) Is Yes. Question 2) You decide to pay double for your bottle of scotch as a small bribe and so answer Yes. Question 3) Your charisma is +2 so Yes again! So, use DC10 persuasion check, which this time you pass! The Barman discreetly relays the information to you.

Example 2.

You come across a solitary goblin and rather than kill it you decide to scare it off. An opposed skill check of Intimidation vs Intelligence should do the trick, or you

could use the chart 1) No. 2) Yes. (Your weapons and background) and 3) Yes +2 Strength. So use DC10

Adjusting the DC.

We can't discuss every possibility and no situation is ever the same. Factors for which we can't account for here, may become noteworthy. So, if something in the scene is particularly relevant, consider adding a modifier to the DC.

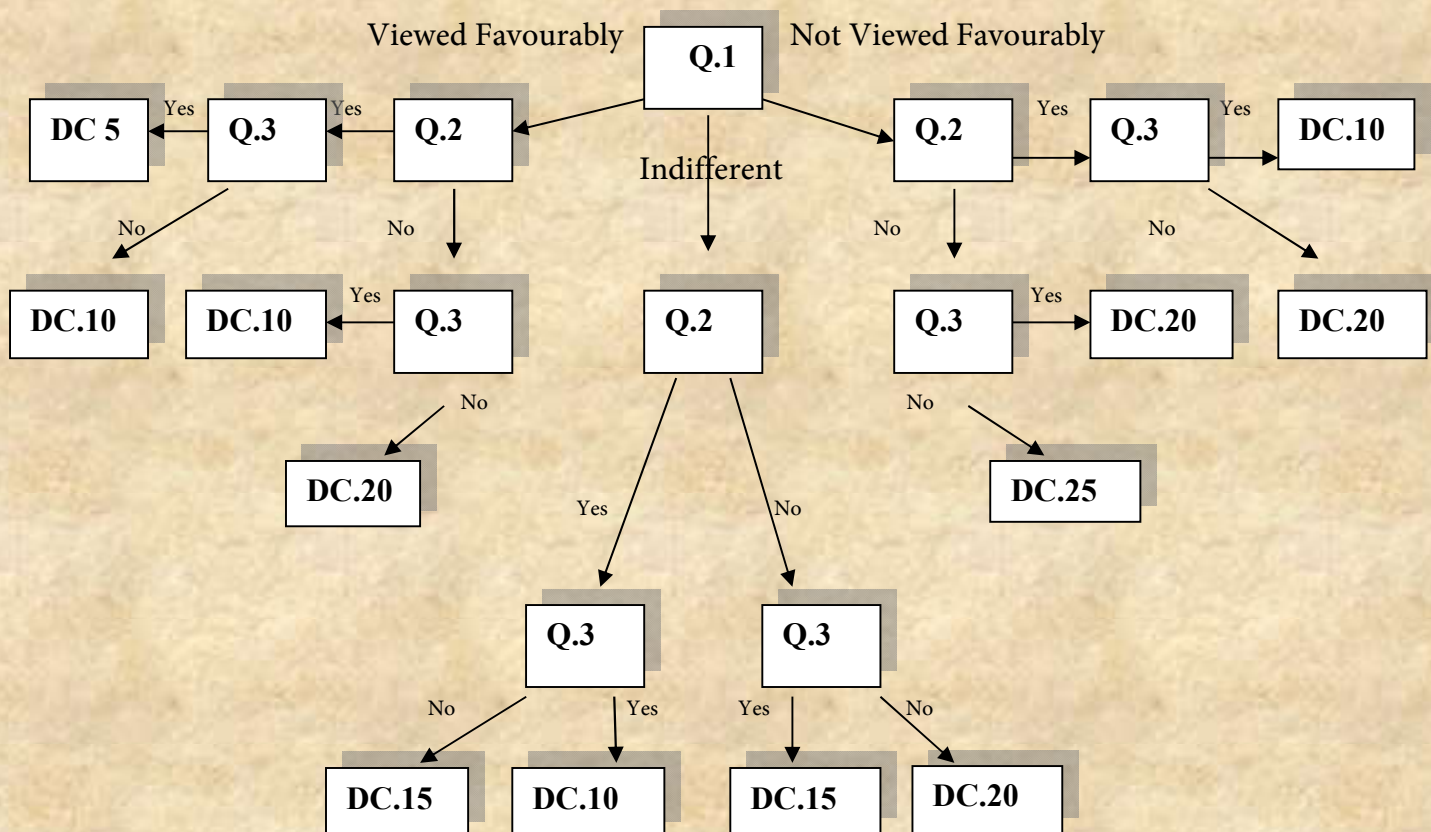
+or- 1 to the DC for every minor factor.

+or- 2 to the DC for every major factor.

So, in example 2 had the goblin had two other goblins with him, you may have added +2 for each Goblin to the total DC, raising it to DC14.



Social Interaction Chart



Questions.

- Q.1 Does the character you want to interact with view you favourably?
 Q.2 Is there anything in your possession, recent events or back story that might help?
 Q.3 Does the core stat relating to this task have a positive or negative modifier? (o=Positive)

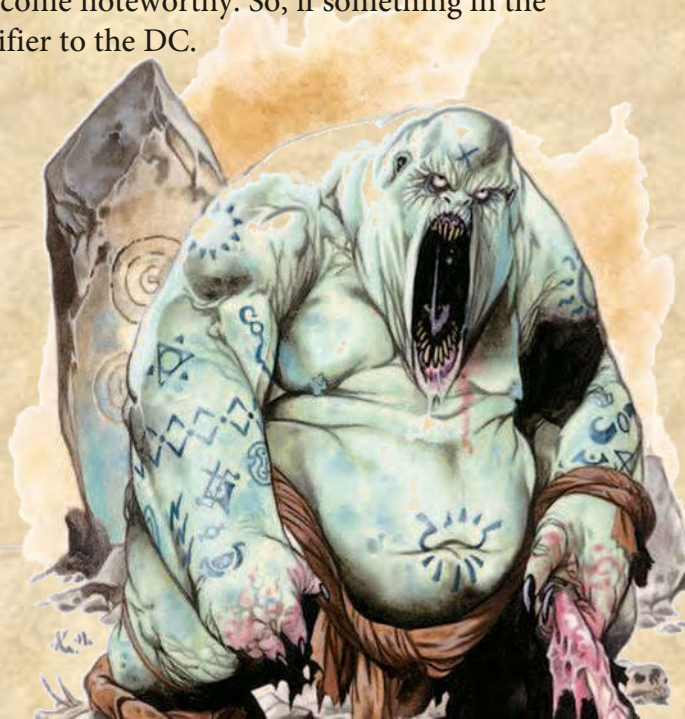
Consider adjusting the DC.

Factors for which we can't account for, here, may become noteworthy. So, if something in the scene is particularly relevant consider adding a modifier to the DC.

+or- 1 to the DC for every minor factor.

+or- 2 to the DC for every major factor.

Task Difficulty	DC
Trivial	5
Easy	10
Moderate	15
Hard	20
Very Hard	25
Nearly Impossible	30



3rd Pillar Combat

Combat is the easiest of all to deal with. Nothing really needs to change. You work out the initiative as normal, then resolve the combat. All I would say is, "Be honest to the character you are controlling in that moment." The adventure will tell you how they fight, (to the death or flee at a certain point) just be true to how the author intended it to be. For better or worse! Maybe using one of the methods above if you become knocked out, to decide if you're captured, killed or left for dead.

Rebalancing your character.

Obviously having a normal character on their own in an adventure designed for four will give them a major disadvantage, so we need to even the odds! There are several ways this can be done. You may, having played for a bit find a good solution for yourself, but in the mean time here's three different approaches that have all worked for me.

- 1) My preferred method. Build a character of the appropriate level in the normal way. Then multiply the hit points by 3.75, Multiply the characters actions by 3, dropping to 2 at half hit points and 1 at quarter hit points. Spell slots should be multiplied by 3 and take a look at its special ability's. Any ability that lasts for a period of time leave as it is. Any ability that causes a one-off bonus of some kind, multiply by 3. (This is deliberately vague advice as there are hundreds of abilities so using your common sense is the order of the day). In terms of deciding combat initiative, for **each** action you should roll initiative to find its place in the turn order.

Pros, you only need one character sheet, there's reduced risk of an "actions deficit." (Only having one characters worth of actions in a combat turn).

Cons, A bit of maths, setting it up and you need to keep an eye on your HP, so as to adjust character actions.

- 2) Build and control a party of four standard characters at the appropriate level.

Pros, It's the closest to how the game was intended to be played. You get access to a large number of tactics, spells and abilities.

Cons, Lots to manage and keep track of by yourself.

- 3) Using the table below build a single character at a higher level to compensate for being alone.

Recommended character level for adventure	Actual level of Solo Character
1 st Level	4 th
2 nd Level	5 th
3 rd Level	7 th
4 th Level	9 th
5 th Level	12 th
6 th Level	13 th
7 th Level	15 th
8 th Level	17 th
9 th Level	19 th
10 th Level	20 th

(figures based on guidance from "balancing encounters" Pg 88 Xanathars guide to everything)

Pros, Only one character to manage, strong at lower levels and at the beginning of an adventure, access to some high-level abilities and spells

Cons, May be considered overly powerful at the beginning or early on. Danger of "Actions deficit" in combat.

General tips and tricks

1) Nothing kills immersion more than dropping out of the game to look something up, try to make decisions spontaneously. You don't need to check back stories and sourcebooks to see if a character or NPC has something that might help. Just use your best guess, reach into your vast knowledge of the fantasy genre and take a punt. You will either know, have a good idea or use the yes/no method to find out.

- 2) Use the yes/no method to paint a picture fast and to get a flavour for the situation or encounter you're in. Colour the world you're in with your imagination, you have a life's worth of references buried in your skull.
- 3) Be truthful. Ultimately, it's your game. But the fun comes from the unexpected twists and turns. So, answer the charts as honestly as you can, even if your guts tell you bad stuff is about happen.

Core Stat	Player Character Stat	Used for
Strength	Athletics.	Strength measures bodily power, and athletic training.
Dexterity	Acrobatics, Sleight of hand, Stealth.	Dexterity measures agility, reflexes, and balance.
Constitution	N/A	Constitution measures, health, stamina, and vital force.
Intelligence	Arcane, History, Investigation,	Intelligence measures mental acuity,

	Nature, Religion.	accuracy of recall, and the ability to see reason
Wisdom	Animal Handling, Insight, Medicine, Perception, Survival.	Wisdom measures perceptiveness, intuition, and attunement with the surrounding world
Charisma	Deception, Intimidation, Performance, Persuasion.	Charisma measures force of personality, persuasiveness, personal magnetism, social influence, and physical attractiveness.

So that's about it as far as the advice goes. In the spirit of its creation and the ethos of Dungeons and Dragons feel free to adjust and adapt these ideas as you see fit. I have managed to have many memorable adventures using these methods. I hope you do too.

Other uses for this document

I have found it a useful tool for testing out story lines in adventures I've written, before I run them for my players. It can also be used by new DM's to help them make decisions and learn the ropes. And for couples looking to play together.

Other options

It's worth noting there are other methods of experiencing D&D alone. There are specially written modules also on the guild and non-system specific conversion rules as well as choose your own adventure style books.

About

If you liked this, you may like some of my other publications found on DM's Guild.

[The Dragon and the Spellbook](#) (Adventure)

[The Halflings Tale](#) (Adventure)

[Monsters of the Guild](#) (Song of the Sea, submission)

My aim is to make every publication better than the last. So, if you have any comments or constructive advice please feel free to drop me a message.

You can view some more RPG related stuff on my Youtube Channel here

[Liberum Esse](#)

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