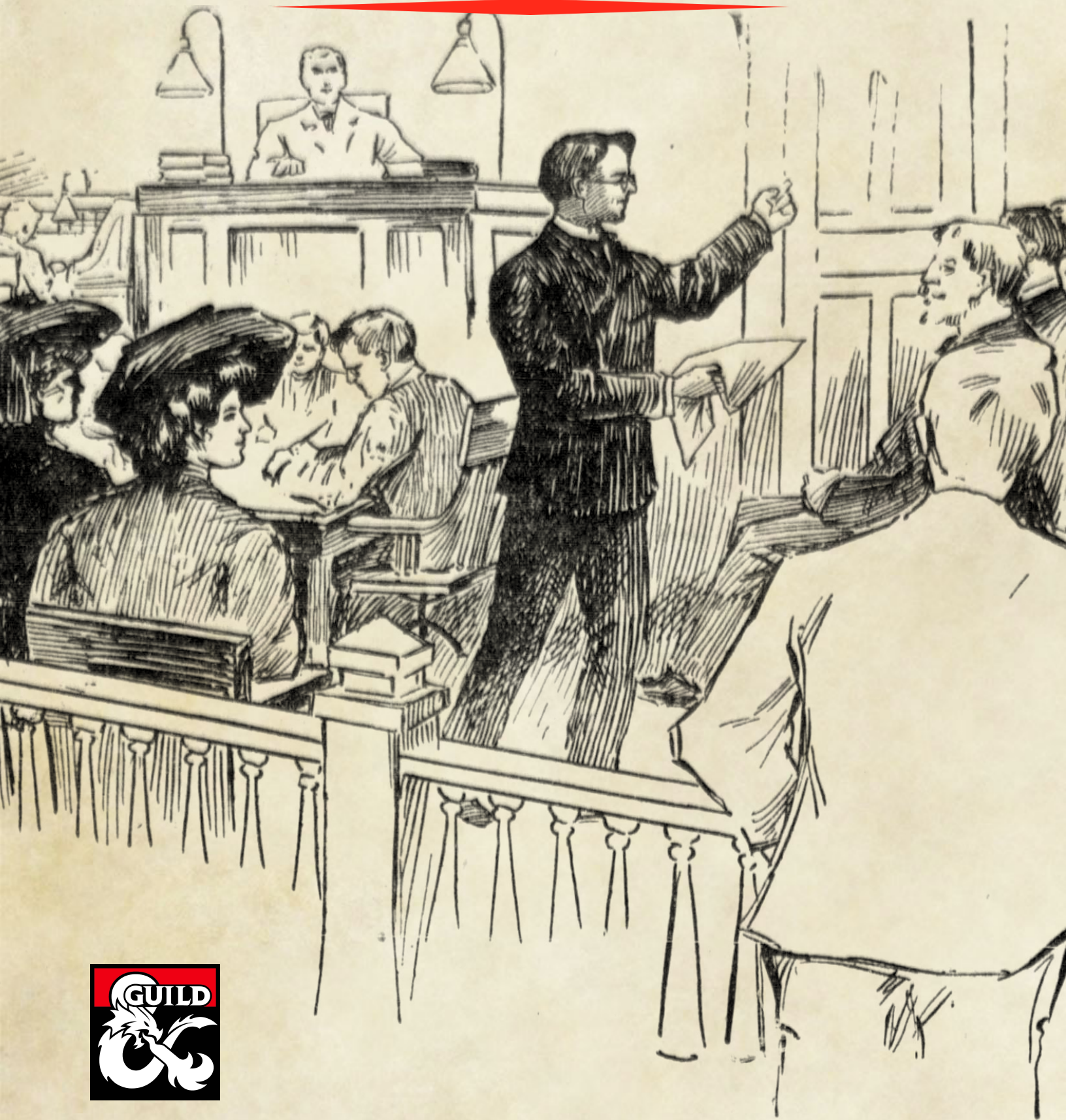


# SOCIAL COMBAT



Rules for Formal Debates in 5th Edition Dungeons and Dragons

# SOCIAL COMBAT

These rules allow for debates to be much more in depth than a single Persuasion vs Insight roll. It allows for wordplay battles with similar complexity to the swordplay battles more commonly focused on in these games. It makes traits like Alignment and Ideals mechanically relevant rather than mere flavor choices. These rules will not be for everyone, but for certain playstyles they can be invaluable. Note that even if you include these rules in your game, not every disagreement needs to become a formal debate.

Just like with physical combat, these rules can be used for PvP but are intended for use between PCs and NPCs.

There are two core statistics for these rules: **Conviction** and **Resolve**. Think of Conviction like your social Armor Class and Resolve like your social Hit Points.

## STEP 1: INITIATIVE

Social combat begins similarly to how physical combat begins, with the exception of surprise. The one who initiates the debate gets a "surprise round" in that by initiating they get to set the Topic and make the Opening Argument. Usually, social combat cannot be started during physical combat.

### 1A: SETTING THE TOPIC

The **Topic** is the point being argued. It should be a declarative statement no longer than one sentence which may be either agreed with or disagreed with, which the initiator wishes those involved in the debate to agree with, such as "We are allowed to be here" or "The king isn't such a bad guy, really" or "You are going to give us that gemstone".

### 1B: SETTING RESOLVE

As soon as the Topic is set, each creature who will participate in the debate sets their starting **Resolve** for that Topic based on their beliefs and opinions, as follows:

#### Resolve - Opinion

-20	Very Strongly Agree
-10	Strongly Agree
-5	Agree
0	Unsure
5	Disagree
10	Strongly Disagree
20	Very Strongly Disagree

Resolve has a maximum of 20 and a minimum of -20 regardless of the amount you start with. When a creature's Resolve changes to (or past) a number on the chart over the course of the debate, their opinion on the Topic changes commensurately.

If the same Topic is brought up again later, whether in the same debate or a future one, you do not get to choose a new Resolve for it, but must use your last Resolve for that Topic. The DM can rule a new Topic too similar to a previous one, causing it to use the Resolve for that Topic rather than starting afresh.

### 1C: THE OPENING ARGUMENT

Once all participants have set their Resolve, the initiator makes their first Argument, following the rules laid out in Step 2 for making an argument.

### 1D: ROLL INITIATIVE

After the initiator completes their opening argument, all present who wish to join the debate roll initiative as though starting physical combat, using Intelligence in place of Dexterity, as this represents how quickly you can formulate your argument or counterargument.

## STEP 2: MAKE AN ARGUMENT

An Argument is to social combat as an Attack is to physical combat. It is a statement made by a creature to attempt to convince those involved in the debate to agree with the current Topic. It takes an Action on your turn, but can take anywhere from five seconds or less to two minutes or more, depending on the complexity of the argument being made. Your turn is not limited to six seconds, but lasts as long as necessary to complete your argument.

### 2A: STATE YOUR CASE

State, in character, the argument your character wishes to make. If you are uncomfortable roleplaying this deeply, you can simply describe their point in the abstract, but you must say more than simply "I roll a Persuasion check" as the nature of your point will affect your damage roll.

Your argument is made with a Charisma check, using Intimidation if your argument is an appeal to fear, Deception if it is a deliberate attempt to make others believe something you know to be false, or Persuasion otherwise.

### 2B: DETERMINE CONVICTION

Unlike with most physical attacks, you do not choose a target for your argument. Arguments target all participants in a debate simultaneously, assuming they can hear the argument and it is in a language they understand. You can choose whether your argument includes yourself as a target or not.

As a physical attack must overcome its target's Armor Class, an Argument must overcome each participant's **Conviction** in order to affect that creature's Resolve.

Your Conviction is equal to 10 + your Wisdom modifier. If your alignment is Lawful, you get a +2 bonus to Conviction; if your alignment is Chaotic, you get a -2 penalty instead. If your alignment is Neutral on either axis, you get a -1 penalty to Conviction (this stacks to -2 if you are True Neutral).

If you are proficient with the Insight skill and the argument is a Deception, you can add your proficiency bonus to your Conviction for that argument.

### 2C: DETERMINE DAMAGE

If the Argument's Charisma check is equal to or greater than your Conviction, the arguer rolls 1d4. Your Resolve for the current Topic is reduced by the amount rolled. This die is doubled on a natural 20 attack roll as normal.

The damage roll is modified based on the nature of the argument, as described in step 2a. For each of the following traits that the argument plays up to (or fights against), increase (or reduce) the damage by 1: *Alignment* (per axis), *Personality Trait*, *Ideal*, *Bond*, *Flaw*. Damage to Resolve can become negative with these modifiers, and increases Resolve by that amount. If using these social combat rules, every creature should have either 1 or 2 of each of these traits.

These adjustments should be made in secret by the DM when affecting NPCs, as the players may not be aware of all of that creature's relevant traits. Researching your mark and learning their biases is an essential tactic to successfully engaging them in debate.

Whether a particular argument plays on or fights against a particular trait is up to the DM's judgment, but DMs are encouraged to listen to their players' interpretations as they are the ones who best understand their character's mindset.

### STEP 3: THE REST OF YOUR TURN

---

Anything you can do on your turn in physical combat, you can also do on your turn in social combat. Making an Argument is an Action, but you can take any other Action available to you, in addition to any one available Bonus Action, plus your movement and anything that can be done as part of an action (such as drawing a weapon) or without spending an action (such as ending concentration on a spell).

If you take any hostile action during social combat, such as taking the Attack action, the debate immediately ends and new initiative is rolled for physical combat as usual.

In addition, there are some special options available to you specifically for use in Social Combat, as follows:

#### COUNTERARGUMENT

A Counterargument is much like an Argument, but it is made in opposition to the Topic rather than in favor of it, and heals Resolve rather than damaging it. In all other ways, it follows the same rules as making an Argument.

#### LEAVE DEBATE/CHANGE TOPIC

As an Action, you can give up your place in the initiative order and stop participating in the debate.

Alternatively, as an Action you can shelve the current Topic and introduce a new Topic, making an Opening Argument as part of the same Action.

Whether leaving the debate or changing the topic, you must do so in one of the following three ways. (You can pretend to use one method while really using another with a successful Deception vs Insight roll, but you must behave as though you used the method you are pretending to use, otherwise the Deception roll automatically fails.)

**Concede.** You set your Resolve to -5 for the current Topic (if it is already lower, it stays where it is), claiming to agree with the statement being argued.

**Postpone/Agree to Disagree.** You state your intention to think on the Topic and continue the argument at a later time. Alternatively, you state your respect for the other participants' positions but choose to maintain your own. In either case, you can set your Resolve for the current Topic to 0, otherwise it stays at its current position.

**Huff.** You pig-headedly dig in your heels and refuse to listen any further. Your Resolve for the current Topic returns to the position you originally set it to for this Topic, but you take a -1 penalty to *all future Social Combat rolls* targeting anyone who observes you doing this, as you have shown yourself to be unreasonable. This penalty stacks with itself if you do this multiple times. (DMs should use this option sparingly; if these Social Combat rules are part of your game, your players should be given every reasonable opportunity to make use of them.)

#### INTERRUPT

You can use your Reaction to make an Argument or Counterargument or Leave the Debate or Change Topic on someone else's turn. If you make an Argument or Counterargument this way, it takes a -5 penalty on the attack roll and a -1 penalty on the damage roll. If you Change the Topic this way without Conceding, your Opening Argument takes the aforementioned penalties, in addition to which you take a -1 penalty to all Social Combat rolls until the Topic you changed away from becomes the current Topic again.

### STEP 4: ENDING THE DEBATE

---

Once all participants have a Resolve of -5 or less, or all participants have a Resolve of 5 or more, or all participants have left the debate, the initiative order is dropped and the debate ends. If the debate would end this way but a participant wishes to keep the debate going with the current participants and initiative order, they can use a reaction to Change Topic with no penalty.

If the debate is ended in some other way, such as by physical combat being initiated or by the floor giving out from under everyone's feet, all participants are treated as having taken the Leave Debate (Postpone) action.

All Resolve for all Topics stays where it is from debate to debate. If your Resolve for a Topic is between -9 and 9, you can initiate a debate on that Topic with yourself, but if you Change Topic or Leave Debate in a Huff when debating with yourself you take the described penalty vs anyone who discovers you have done this as though they had observed you doing so.

### STEP 5: EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

---

Sometimes you encounter clear evidence outside of a debate that proves you right or wrong. At DM discretion, when sufficient evidence is brought to your attention other than through debate, it may increase or decrease your Resolve for a relevant Topic, or even set it to a particular level.

#### VARIANT: HAGGLING

---

You can use these rules to haggle over prices, with the Topic being the item in question instead of a declarative statement and each participant's Resolve being the percentage of market price they wish to pay/charge for said item rather than their opinion on the Topic.

The debate ends when both participants have the same Resolve. Conceding sets your Resolve to the other participant's Resolve instead of setting it to -5. Change Topic can be used to change to haggling over a different item. Setting your Resolve to 0 sets it to 100% instead.

# THANKS FOR READING!

These rules were inspired by the **Social Combat** segments of the *Lunar Quest* webcomic by *Jukashi*, which was itself based on *Exalted*.

©2019 Caleb Wichman

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, Wizards of the Coast, Forgotten Realms, the dragon ampersand, Player's Handbook, Monster Manual, Dungeon Master's Guide, D&D Adventurers League, all other Wizards of the Coast product names, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast in the USA and other countries. All characters and their distinctive likenesses are property of Wizards of the Coast. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast.

©2016 Wizards of the Coast LLC, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707, USA. Manufactured by Hasbro SA, Rue Emile-Boéchat 31, 2800 Delémont, CH. Represented by Hasbro Europe, 4 The Square, Stockley Park, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB11 1ET, UK.

