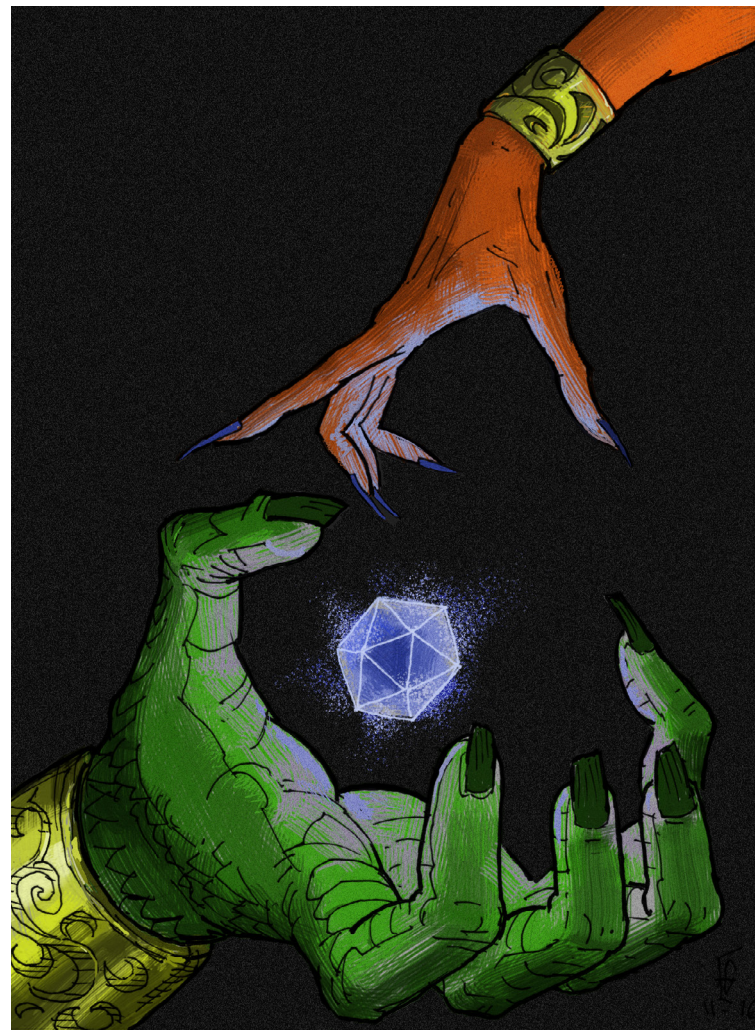


# INSPIRED GIVING

## **I**NSPIRATION, A CONCEPT

introduced in the core rules, provides a way for the GM to reward players for role-playing their characters and contributing to the game. The four key markers for awarding inspiration come by way of a character's background and fall into one of four categories: Personality Traits, Ideals, Bonds, and Flaws. The GM grants inspiration when a player connects one of these categories with memorable or fun roleplaying. With inspiration, the player can choose to gain advantage on any d20 roll. This simple but elegant reward spices up the game for everyone and encourages players to contribute to the game's shared enjoyment. It also reinforces character concepts.



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At the same time, giving inspiration can prove challenging for the GM and players alike. Giving inspiration requires the GM to track four different personality categories for each character; in a group of five or six players, this alone represents over twenty narrative elements the GM must remember. From the player side, some people are self-conscious advocating for themselves or others with regards to inspiration. What happens when you roleplay your flaw or your bond, but the GM fails to notice? Do you draw attention to your efforts? Do you try harder? Or do you stop trying altogether? Likewise, some players dislike the metagame aspect of earning and spending inspiration. They feel the process is too mechanical.

The official GM's guide offers suggestions for awarding and using inspiration. In addition, here are ten additional ways you can award, earn, and use inspiration at your table. Each approach serves a different purpose and encourages a different play style. Use any of these methods, combine them with the standard inspiration system, or mix and match to suit your needs.

## INSPIRATION METHODS

### ACTION HERO POOL

Players earn into a shared pool when they attempt outrageous cinematic stunts, such as leaping onto a flying griffon's back, swinging from a burning rope while fighting an opponent, or diving into a monster's maw to deliver the killing blow.

Any player can expend an inspiration point (or "action point," if you prefer) as long as one remains in the pool. A player spends one of these points to help perform even crazier, more daring stunts. Spending inspiration from the pool gives

the character advantage on an ability check or attack roll when attempting a cinematic action.

**Suggested Limits:** After a player draws from the action pool, they cannot do so again until all other players have drawn once from the pool.

Expending this type of inspiration only grants advantage to proactive rolls, like attacks and ability checks. Reactive rolls, such as saving throws, cannot benefit from this form of inspiration, encouraging risky, bold moves while not necessarily protecting characters from consequences.

### BRING THE DRAMA

When the GM wants to throw a plot twist or dramatic reversal at a character, she offers inspiration to the player as incentive. For example, the GM plans for a villain to kidnap a character's brother for an upcoming ritual. The GM knows how attached the player is to that NPC, and thus discusses this with her ahead of time. If the player agrees, the GM grants inspiration and, at a future time, the kidnapping occurs. If the player refuses, the GM drops the plot thread or modifies it.

This method of granting inspiration requires collaboration between players and their GM. It can help players become more involved in the campaign, and it gives them more agency in the story's evolution. This encourages greater communication between participants. As a downside, this system can ruin surprising story developments and plot twists since players gain forewarning.

**Suggested Limits:** The GM should "spread the drama" fairly among all players, not just those most amenable to this method. Since some players become uncomfortable in the spotlight, the GM should offer other ways for them to gain inspiration beyond this method.

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## DEAD POOL

Players earn inspiration the standard way, but they can donate their inspiration into a pool. Any player can draw from this pool for saving throws (especially death saving throws), or for times when a failed die roll may lead to character death.

**Suggested Limits:** After a player draws from the pool, they cannot do so again until at least one other character has drawn once. The inspiration in this pool can only be used to gain advantage on reactive rolls, primarily to help characters avoid death or incapacitation.

## DEVIL'S BARGAIN

Players give inspiration points to the GM in exchange for rerolls, advantage, or overcoming obstacles. In return, the GM spends inspiration just as players would, to give NPCs and monsters advantage on their riskiest rolls.

With this system, either the GM can offer a bargain to a player, or a player can request a bargain with the GM. For example, Josh needs to roll hit points for his barbarian's new experience level. The GM offers a deal: "advantage" on the hit point die roll (understanding that advantage generally only applies to d20 rolls) in exchange for a point of inspiration. If the player agrees, they roll two d12s and takes the best result, and the GM adds another point to their inspiration pool.

Some players may balk at giving the GM additional "weapons" to use against them later, but the system is voluntary—players must choose to accept the bargain for the GM to gain inspiration.

**Suggested Limits:** Although the GM can accumulate multiple inspirations, they can only expend inspiration once per encounter or scene—and only to benefit an important villain, boss monster, or NPC.



The GM should offer such bargains equally to all players to avoid favoritism. Generally, each player can only make one such bargain per game session.

Players and the GM should agree beforehand whether to allow metagame bargains, such as advantage on hit point rolls, or whether such bargains should only involve in-game activities, e.g., ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws.

## DRAMATIC FLAIR

A player deliberately takes disadvantage on an important d20 roll to earn inspiration. For example, a character needs to gain the confidence of an influential priest, but chooses to roll his Persuasion check with disadvantage. If he succeeds, he receives inspiration for later.

This method proves especially appropriate for bards, swashbucklers, and characters who like to show off their talents or revel in glory. In essence, the character purposefully handicaps his efforts to put on a show and demonstrate mastery.

**Suggested Limits:** Taking disadvantage on an unimportant or minor die roll doesn't earn inspiration. A player can only earn inspiration with this method once per game.

## EPIC SUCCESS

Inspiration represents something special, over and above simple advantage on a die roll. To heighten the importance of inspiration above ordinary advantage, if both d20 rolls prove successful, then the character achieves heightened success. For example, an attack inflicts a critical hit or maximum normal damage, or the character completes a skill check (e.g., picking a lock or searching a room) in half the normal time. The GM has final say as to the benefits of an epic success, but the player involved should offer suggestions.

**Suggested Limits:** Since epic success requires the expenditure of inspiration and success with both d20 rolls, no additional limits should be necessary.





## EPIPHANY

For exceptional or impressive gaming moments, the GM can award enhanced inspiration—think of this as “brilliant inspiration,” an “epiphany.” With brilliant inspiration, the player so awarded gains inspiration for two different future dice rolls. Alternatively, that player can use one inspiration on a personal die roll and grant the other inspiration to another player. The players involved should describe how this plays out in the scene for added dramatic effect.

**Suggested Limits:** Award brilliant inspiration no more than once per player per session, and only for truly exceptional moments of gaming gold. When a player pulls off an incredible role-playing performance or attempts some action that reduces the entire table to laughter, tears, or breathless excitement, you’ll know that character earned it.

One warning: cautious or shy players may find it difficult to earn this form of inspiration. Keep each player’s personality in mind and understand that the threshold for an awesome gaming moment isn’t the same for everyone.

## GM’S REWARD

Players award inspiration to the GM for impressive, terrifying, or exciting scenes, plots, and villains. In return, the GM spends inspiration to help a master villain survive or to gain advantage on a die roll for a boss monster.

Although this method of giving inspiration is unusual in that it makes the characters’ lives more challenging, it serves as a way to reward the GM for a great game. By giving inspiration, the players acknowledge their GM’s creativity and hard work.

**Suggested Limits:** The GM can only spend his reward inspiration for important villains, critters, and NPCs when doing so furthers the story and makes the campaign more enjoyable for everyone. The GM can only have one such inspiration at a time.

## INSPIRED DAMAGE

In addition to standard inspiration, the GM can award inspired damage dice. When a player expends inspired damage dice as part of a successful attack, they roll two of the same

damage die and take the better result. Whereas the GM normally only awards standard inspiration once per player per session, they can award multiple inspired damage dice to each player. A player can expend inspired damage dice singly or in multiples.

**Suggested Limits:** Limit inspired damage dice to three per character per session.

### PLAYER INSPIRATION POOL

Allow your players to award inspiration to each other for good gaming and role-playing. One easy, visual way to encourage this involves a pool of tokens, dice, or similar markers kept on the table in front of everyone. At the start of each game, the GM places one marker in the pool for each player. During the game, any player can award any other player inspiration from the pool.

**Suggested Limits:** Each player can only earn inspiration once per game. To encourage equal participation, each player can only award inspiration to one other player per game. The group should establish guidelines as to what sort of actions should earn inspiration. Does bringing snack food for everyone qualify? What about making the GM snort soda out their nose from laughter?

### OTHER SUGGESTIONS

One of the best suggestions for using inspiration comes from the GM's guide and features a visual cue: when you grant inspiration, hand the recipient player a special d20. After the player expends her inspiration, the die returns to you. Along similar lines, consider using colored glass

beads to represent inspiration. These small, oval-shaped beads come in a variety of colors, are inexpensive, and are widely available in craft stores. When granting standard inspiration (i.e., advantage on a future d20 roll), give the recipient player a black bead. For exceptional or unusual inspiration (e.g., "brilliant inspiration"), give the player a red bead. This serves as a visual reminder to everyone at the table. Another alternative is to use one color for inspiration awarded to players, and another color for inspiration given to the GM. The beads prove especially helpful for tracking multiple "points" of inspiration.

Overall, think of inspiration as a way to help your players be awesome. A cautious player may feel more comfortable taking risks or performing bold actions if they have inspiration to bolster their efforts. Giving inspiration can incentivize certain play styles. For example, if you grant inspiration to reward a character's amazing stunt, you are showing everyone at the table that you value that play style. If you give inspiration only outside combat to reward role-playing, then you're revealing a different sort of preference. The reverse, e.g., not granting inspiration for certain play styles or actions, likewise reveals your preferences and tells the players something about your GMing style.

Giving, earning, and using inspiration provides an excellent way to enhance the game for the GM and her players alike. It rewards good role-playing and encourages everyone at the table to participate. Whether you use the system described in the core rules or one of these alternatives giving inspiration offers one of the best and easiest ways to enhance your game.