

CONVERSIONS TO 5TH EDITION D&D

This document provides guidelines for converting characters and adventures from earlier editions of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS to the fifth edition.

Conversion of D&D material is more art than science. The aim of conversion is to arrive at something that feels like the older-edition version, rather than at an exact replication. The guidelines in this document are intended to help you create what you want, not to force your choices along particular lines.

CONVERTING YOUR PLAYER CHARACTER

Work with your DM to determine the best fit for your conversion. Your DM is the final arbiter of any conversion.

LEVEL

Your DM sets the starting level of a converted character. For fourth edition characters, fifth edition level is two-thirds of fourth edition level, rounded normally instead of always down. For example, 25th level in fourth edition becomes 17th level in fifth edition. Level in other editions converts directly into fifth edition, but only up to 20th level.

RACE

Choose the race that most closely matches your character's race. For instance, a wild elf in Faerûn is closest to the wood elf in the *Player's Handbook*. Replace all racial traits with those from the fifth edition *Player's Handbook*. Ignore traits that have no bearing on fifth edition characters, such as third edition's favored class trait or other editions' class limitations.

Racial proficiencies of like kind—skill, tool, or weapon—can be swapped for their equivalents in fifth edition. You might swap skill proficiency for tool proficiency when the tool is a better representation of a skill from a previous edition.

As an example, a wild elf character should have proficiency with spears, according to the third edition book *Races of Faerûn*. Your character could give up longsword and shortsword proficiency from the Elf Weapon Training trait to have spear and javelin proficiency instead. Similarly, if your elf character from third edition relied on rapier proficiency garnered from race, you might swap longsword proficiency from Elf Weapon Training for rapier proficiency.

FOR THE DM: RACE CONVERSIONS

For races not represented in the *Player's Handbook*, see the "Creating a Race" section in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Start with the racial traits from one or more previous editions. From them, reconstruct the race in fifth edition terms, using existing races and their traits as models. The following general guidelines should help.

Consistency. Keep only those racial traits that are consistent from edition to edition. Especially ignore a trait that appears in only one previous edition.

Ability Scores. Bonuses to ability scores from race and subrace should add up to no more than +3, unless the race has few other beneficial traits. In most cases, no one score should receive a bonus higher than +2.

Three previous editions of the game included negative racial adjustments to ability scores, and two included racial ability score maximums and minimums. Fifth edition avoids such parameters, but in the case of monstrous races, such as kobolds, penalties can be appropriate.

Damage Resistances. In fifth edition, the damage resistance trait has no numeric value. A creature either has resistance to a damage type, or it does not.

Infravision. Racial infravision converts directly to fifth edition's darkvision. Use the race's infravision range for its darkvision, or a range chosen by your DM.

Low-Light Vision. Most races that have low-light vision in third or fourth edition should have darkvision. The range defaults to 60 feet.

Powers. Racial powers can be ignored or converted to the capability of casting a spell similar to the power. A character of the race should have to be of a level high enough to cast the spell as if the character were a spellcaster. For example, a spellcaster should be 5th level to cast a 3rd-level spell. A race that can cast innate spells must have a default spellcasting ability score chosen from among Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma.

Small Modifiers. Other editions' Small races often have traits that offer modifiers to Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws (or defenses), and skills. Ignore a bonus, unless it is +4 or higher and not to Armor Class. If it is at least that high, proficiency or advantage might be called for as a racial trait. Similarly, ignore a penalty that isn't as severe as -4. Such a penalty might call for disadvantage in the applicable situation.

CLASS

Choose the fifth edition class that most closely matches your character's class (or classes, if your character has more than one). Alternatively, choose the class that most closely matches how you'd like your character to be in the game's narrative.

Don't feel constrained by your character's original class or classes. For example, you might decide that warlock or sorcerer is a better fit for your magic-user's story than wizard. Similarly, you are free to decide that fifth edition's paladin class or a cleric of the War domain better expresses your fighter/cleric than multiclassing does.

Class names can frame your thinking (the wizard was called a magic-user in first edition and a mage in second edition). But try to think outside that box. For instance, your fourth edition avenger might be a fifth edition paladin with the Oath of Vengeance or a monk who follows the Way of Shadow. Your fourth edition warden could be a fifth edition cleric of the Nature domain, ranger of the Hunter archetype, or paladin who has taken the Oath of the Ancients.

Multiclassing can be the answer to fulfilling many character concepts. Before multiclassing in fifth edition, however, make sure no single class's development path fits the character's intent better. For instance, the Eldritch Knight fighter archetype might be a good fit for a former fighter/wizard (or magic-user, or even an elf from Basic D&D). Likewise, a bard or a rogue with the Arcane Trickster archetype might be a fine fit for a wizard/rogue (or thief). The aforementioned avenger could be a cleric/monk.

FOR THE DM: CLASS CONVERSIONS

If you'd like to recreate a class from a previous edition, see the "Modifying a Class" section in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Start with the class write-up from one or more previous editions, and compare it to existing fifth edition classes. From that starting point, determine if you can use an existing fifth edition class as a template, modifying it to fit your needs. Try to focus on what made the class thematic across editions, as well as what you know the player would like to play.

ABILITY SCORES

For most editions, a character's ability scores, unmodified by magic, can convert directly to fifth edition values. In all cases, the upper score limit of 20 still applies. A few extra guidelines follow.

Exceptional Strength. First and second edition allowed some characters to have exceptional Strength, expressed as a percentile value following a score of 18. Exceptional Strength has no conversion value, so the character's Strength score becomes 18.

Scores Higher than 20. Especially in fourth edition, scores higher than 20 can occur. Such scores should be treated as 20s, or the alternative for reassigning ability scores described next should be used.

Reassigning Ability Scores. Rather than converting scores, especially if you have trouble doing so, you can follow the rules for determining ability scores set forth in the fifth edition *Player's Handbook*. To do so, use the standard set of scores or customized scores acquired by spending points. Then apply racial adjustments and any adjustments from the Ability Score Improvement class feature. Use the original character's ability scores to guide your choices.

PROFICIENCIES

In fifth edition, a character's proficiency options usually come from race, class, and background. Weapon proficiencies can be changed only with DM permission.

Based on your character's history, you should choose a background for your character during conversion. Alternatively, the DM can help you create an appropriate background. Then pick proficiencies that reflect what the character was good at in the previous edition. Here are a few other guidelines for certain editions.

Second Edition. You can base background choice on the character's secondary skills or best nonweapon proficiencies, if any. If your character had a kit, it could be the basis of your background.

Third Edition. Your character's best skills can guide your background choice. If your campaign setting provided regional or background benefits, you can use those as inspiration too.

Fourth Edition. The third edition method is possible, or you can use the character's background or theme as a guide.

FOR THE DM: BACKGROUND CONVERSIONS

Most of the previous editions provided bases for backgrounds. Second edition rules have secondary skills, nonweapon proficiencies, and character kits. In the span of the third edition rules are backgrounds, regional benefits, and even prestige classes. Fourth edition content also has backgrounds, regional benefits, and character themes. In

all these editions, a character's preferred skills can also indicate a background.

In almost all cases, an existing background can be molded to fit your character. However, if you feel a character needs a new background, first read "Creating a Background" in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Based on the game element used as a model for the background, look to see if an existing background could fit with modifications. If not, use the previous game's element to create a new background.

You can use the character's personality as played in previous game sessions to help define personality traits, an ideal, a bond, and a flaw.

FEATS

In the conversion process, feats from third and fourth edition should usually be ignored, because feats in fifth edition have a very different place in the game than the feats did in those two editions.

Feats in fifth edition can make a character concept come to life outside the race and class structures. Give the fifth edition feats a look if you feel your character lacks a needed aspect after you convert race and class.

SPELLS

Pick spells known as if creating a new character of the appropriate level. You can base the choice of spells known on those from previous editions. Similarly, you can base your choice of cantrips on at-will powers the character knows in fourth edition.

The DM is the arbiter of whether and how a spell that doesn't exist in fifth edition can be converted.

FOR THE DM: SPELL CONVERSIONS

When converting a spell from an earlier edition, your first task is to make sure the intended effect doesn't already exist in a spell in fifth edition. Even if the effect doesn't exist, a similar one might. If you find a similar effect, you can use that spell instead. Or you can base the new spell on the existing one, making the job easier.

When you create a spell, use the "Creating a Spell" section in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The earlier edition's spell is your basis for redesign. For complex spells, such as *earthquake*, give yourself leeway to determine effects based on the context in which the spells are cast. Doing so gives you the opportunity to surprise even the spell's caster when the spell is used.

DETAILS

Your character's other details stay mostly the same, with the following possible exceptions.

Alignment. In most cases, alignments directly correspond between editions. Fourth edition and Basic alignments don't always correspond, so use the following guidelines:

In Basic D&D, you choose lawful, chaotic, or neutral. Lawful corresponds to good—you choose whether it's lawful good, neutral good, or chaotic good. Chaotic similarly matches a form of evil, whether lawful, neutral, or chaotic. For a neutral character, choose lawful neutral, neutral, or chaotic neutral.

For fourth edition, a good character should be your choice of neutral good or chaotic good. An evil character should

be your choice of lawful evil or neutral evil. An unaligned character is your choice of lawful neutral, neutral, or chaotic neutral.

Languages. You should select languages from the fifth edition *Player's Handbook*, or from a list the DM provides, that most closely match the ones the character understood in the character's original edition.

Personality. Based on those in your chosen background, create a trait, ideal, bond, and flaw for your character. Alternatively, choose from those detailed in your new background.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment should be swapped for fifth edition equivalents. The DM handles the conversion and distribution of gear that isn't in the *Player's Handbook*.

FOR THE DM: EQUIPMENT CONVERSIONS

As DM, you can allow characters to retain any gear and loot with which you are comfortable. Swap magic items for fifth edition equivalents. The rules in the "Starting at Higher Level" section of chapter 1 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* are a fine way to establish a character's starting wealth and gear in a fifth edition campaign. In most cases, the high magic option is the best choice for representing treasure distribution of previous editions.

For mundane equipment, most such gear converts easily, since it has pragmatic (and narrative) effects rather than broad mechanical ones. Use existing equipment as guides, and when necessary, create mechanics appropriate to fifth edition. Remember to use advantage instead of flat bonuses. Also, try to limit mechanical effects to at or below those of common magic items.

CONVERTING ADVENTURES

The fifth edition of D&D is fairly compatible with adventures from the first, second, and third editions of the game—enough so that quick conversions of adventures from such editions are possible. Careful conversion is the alternative. As the DM—the one who creates and runs adventures—the choice is yours.

The following sections provide guidelines for careful conversions, quick conversions, and the conversion of treasure.

CAREFUL CONVERSIONS

Converting an adventure to fifth edition with precision requires several detailed steps. Whenever you convert in this way, use what you know about your players' characters to guide the process. Don't bother converting adventure elements you know your players are unlikely to notice or use.

Encounter Difficulty. For encounters, the first step is usually to decide what the difficulty of the encounter should be. Doing so requires more intuition than science. Further, the design from edition to edition and adventure to adventure varies on this point.

For first and second edition, encounters were often designed to be on the easy side. This sort of pacing allowed the characters to do more exploring and have numerous encounters before resting and retreating from the dungeon. Ideally, the characters could reach one or more significant encounters or areas, revealing more of the adventure site's background or story, before retreating. Further, the Dungeon Master could more easily allow disparate groups of

foes, once they were alerted to intruders, to join an ongoing fight. You can replicate such pacing by keeping to easy-to-medium encounter groups in the dungeon without reducing the number of encounters.

In third and fourth editions, the encounter level designated for an encounter is useful for determining the intended encounter difficulty based on the level range of the adventure. (In the case of fourth edition, the actual difficulty level should be taken to be two-thirds of the designated encounter level.) For example, if the encounter level is 9 in an adventure designated to be for 7th-level characters, the encounter is intended to be hard or deadly.

Encounter Structure. Use the encounter as written to decide on its monster composition in fifth edition. Then use the monsters' challenge ratings, as described in the *Monster Manual*, along with the "Creating Encounters" section in chapter 3 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, to modify the encounter to the desired difficulty.

An important aspect of this conversion is providing an experience similar to the original. The number of monsters matters much less than the impression the encounter makes on the players.

With that guideline in mind, remember to adjust for possible reinforcements. When multiple groups of opponents can converge on the characters, it can make for a dynamic battle. But such a conflict can also be deadly, which is fine if that's the intent. However, you can reduce the number of potential foes (all the way to zero), move them so they're not potential reinforcements, or place impediments in the site to prevent easy reinforcement.

Features, Hazards, and Terrain. An encounter includes site features, hazards, and terrain, and these elements can occur with or without monsters being present. Much of the time, you can use such elements without any new rules; it's enough for you to know the rules in the *Player's Handbook* on cover, difficult terrain, falling, holding breath, perception and investigation, and special movement.

You can make exact conversions, such as for secret doors and wilderness hazards, using the guidelines in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. To convert traps and damaging hazards, use the Trap Save DCs and Attack Bonuses and Damage Severity by Level tables from that chapter.

In third and fourth editions, encounter areas are often quite detailed. Don't feel the need to use every detail presented in adventures from those editions. Convert whatever seems likely to be of interest to your players, and leave the rest for improvisation later. For example, a third edition adventure might tell you how to push over a pillar, yet characters seldom decide to push over pillars or attack statues, unless you call attention to an exploitable weakness in such structures. In contrast, it's not unusual for someone to try to break down a locked door, rather than picking the lock.

New Monsters. In older adventures, you'll sometimes run across creatures that lack a published equivalent in fifth edition. In this case, the "Creating a Monster" section in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is your best tool. The "For the DM: Race Conversions" section in this document can also be helpful.

If you choose to create the monster whole cloth, start by replicating the original monster as closely as possible using elements from fifth edition. Use the HD as the creature's HD in fifth edition (the level of a fourth edition monster can determine the number of HD it has). Ability scores should be in the fifth edition range, from 3 to 30; third and fourth

edition ability scores often need to be reduced. For special traits and attacks, use existing creatures as guidelines.

Once you've converted a monster to fifth edition or created a new one, you can use the Monster Statistics by Challenge Rating table in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine the creature's challenge rating. Then, you can adjust HD and other statistics to get the challenge rating you desire.

Treasure. In a careful conversion of treasure, you need to create or roll treasure as if creating it from scratch for the adventure. Use the Individual Treasure and Treasure Hoard tables in chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to create new assortments of treasure, using what's in the original adventure as a guideline. Be sure to read the "Treasure Tables" section of that chapter to decide how you'll use the tables in recreating the treasure. See also the "Treasure Conversions" section later in this document.

Magic Items. Whenever possible, magic items should be swapped for existing magic items from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. If this strategy fails, chapter 9 of that book includes rules for modifying magic items and creating new ones. Use the original item as a starting point and existing items as guidelines.

QUICK CONVERSIONS

Rather than going through the work of full conversion, you may use published adventures from the first three D&D editions as they're printed. You can "convert" during play using the guidelines in this section. Fourth edition adventures are usually amenable to quick conversion.

When you do so, it will be difficult to give experience points based on encounters and to determine encounter difficulty accurately. Therefore, be prepared to improvise and allow level advancement through alternative methods, such as those described in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

The first task is to select an adventure of the appropriate level for your player characters. Characters of a level in the middle of a suggested level range are likely to find the most challenge with the least overt risk of excessively difficult encounters. In any case, adventures along the lower and middle parts of the level spectrum work better with quick conversion.

Once you've chosen the adventure, use the following guidelines:

Monster Statistics. For first and second edition, you can use the shorthand monster statistics in the adventure. In these adventures, monsters are often more numerous, but they typically deal lower damage and have fewer hit points than their fifth edition counterparts. Make the following changes to those first- and second-edition monsters:

- Armor Class equals 19 minus the creature's AC, up to AC 22.
- Attack roll modifiers are $HD/2 + 2$, up to +12.
- Saving throw DCs are $8 + HD/2$, up to 20.
- If a creature has to make a check or saving throw, and should be good at the roll, use the creature's $HD/2 + 2$ as a bonus on the roll. Otherwise, use no modifier, or use a penalty to reflect something the creature should be bad at.

In third edition, you can use monster statistics included in an adventure as a guide. Monster distribution in this edition is fairly close to the distribution in fifth edition. As

in earlier editions, such creatures often deal lower damage and have fewer hit points than their fifth edition counterparts. Most statistics in third edition include the creature's ability scores. Use the following parameters:

- Armor Class can be an average of touch AC and actual AC, or 20 percent lower than in third edition. The upper limit is 22.
- Attack roll modifiers are the appropriate ability score modifier + 3.
- Saving throw DCs are 10 + the appropriate ability score modifier.
- If a creature has to make a check or saving throw, use its ability score modifiers. Grant it a +3 bonus if it should be good at the roll.

Monster Groups. If a group of monsters has 7 or more members, it should be evaluated to see if numbers should be reduced. Such a reduction is especially important for player characters of lower than 5th level.

Spells. For spells, use the most closely matching spells from the fifth edition *Player's Handbook*. You can assign spellcasters cantrips, but doing so is optional. Third edition's 0-level spells can be used as guidelines for such selections.

Traps. For traps, improvise by using the guidelines in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Your best tools are the Trap Save DCs and Attack Bonuses and Damage Severity by Level tables from that chapter. Keep copies of those tables handy. Also, keep falling damage in mind.

Treasure. Adventures in previous editions often contain more treasure than is common in fifth edition. In third edition, NPCs were especially rich sources of magic items. When improvising, give out only the treasure you're happy with the characters acquiring.

TREASURE CONVERSIONS

In fifth edition, treasure isn't as abundant and magic items aren't as necessary to character performance as in previous editions.

As the *Dungeon Master's Guide* says, you can hand out as much or as little treasure as you want. Instead of painstakingly recreating treasure to fifth edition parameters, you can use the tables in that book as guidelines for intuitively reconstructing an adventure's treasure. Alternatively, you can hand out whatever is in the adventure, modified to account for fifth edition constraints.

One such constraint is that the highest bonus in fifth edition is usually +3, although a particularly mighty legendary item could confer a +4 bonus. A +6 weapon might have been essential for a particular fourth edition character to function, but even a +1 weapon makes a similar fifth edition character better. Although a character might have had a weapon with a high bonus in a previous edition, maintaining a correspondingly high bonus in fifth edition is unnecessary. Further, the functions of a magic weapon or armor, unrelated to its bonus, are often the most interesting aspects of the item.

Another constraint, although one that is less strict, is the amount of money and salable goods that characters can acquire. The Treasure Hoard tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* show appropriate amounts for accumulated treasure. At each level, a party of adventurers has access to two or three hoards from the appropriate hoard tables.