



Bullet Points

Action!

By Owen K.C. Stephens

Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Owen K.C. Stephens, writer of a lot of material for the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** and the **d20 Modern** game, author of the recently announced *d20 Cyberscape* book, and co-author of the new *d20 Apocalypse* supplement. It's my job to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky rules issues, and give you a little peek into the design philosophy of the game.

Every two weeks I pick an issue that's provoked a lot of questions or comments, begin with a general discussion of the topic where applicable, and then answer specific questions related to it. If the mailbox contains any unrelated but pressing questions, I might tackle them at the end of the column, but only if I have room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.

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This installment focuses on the questions about action points that have trickled in over the past few weeks. The action point system is one of the few features that sets the **d20 Modern** game apart from the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game**, and many other games that utilize the d20 System.

Questions and Answers

The rules for action points are fairly straightforward, but the following questions address a few gray areas in the system and indicate some spots where the basics may need some reinforcement. So without further ado, let's get down to the questions!

 **If I decide to spend an action point and my character gets only a tiny bonus from it, can I spend another action point? If so, do I replace my old d6 roll with a new one, or do I add the two together?**

Under normal circumstances you can't spend 2 action points on the same action, since you can't spend more than 1 action point in a round. If some ability your hero has allows him to spend more than 1 action point in a round, its description should also define what happens when you do so. I can't find any examples of such an ability just now, but if anyone wants to ask about a specific case, feel free to send in the question.


 **Why do some classes get more action points than others? Each of the base classes gets 5 + one-half level, but a Soldier gets 6 + one-half level, and an Archmage or Artificer gets 7 + one-half level. What gives?**

Generally speaking, the base number of action points is 5 action for a base class, 6 for an advanced class, and 7 for a prestige class. One-half the character's level is added to the base in each case.

The design philosophy behind this breakdown is that as characters take levels in advanced (and possibly prestige) classes, they are becoming more and more focused, and the extra action points allow them to perform

even better in areas relating to their specialties -- and in other areas as well.

In practical terms, just think of the extra action points as an incentive to find an advanced and/or prestige class you like for your character. If you're a GM, remember to extend this concept to any classes from other sources that you use in your campaign as well.


 **The rules say that if you use 1 action point to activate a class ability, you can't use another in the same round to add to a die roll. Does this rule mean that you can't spend an action point to boost a roll associated with a class ability requiring an action point for activation? Or do you just have to take 2 rounds to get the boost? For example, wouldn't it be legal to use start full-round action to begin building a gadget using scientific improvisation (from the Field Scientist advanced class) and spend the action point for activation in that round? If so, couldn't you then spend another action point to boost the Craft check that the ability requires when your hero finishes the action during the next round? If not, why not?**

It's certainly legal to use start/complete full-round action with scientific improvisation, so your interpretation is legal -- provided that you make the Craft check when the full round of scientific improvisation is done, and you spend the action point for it when you start your 1 round of work, rather than when you finish it. Neither of those points is specified in the rules.

However, it would be well within a GM's purview to rule that either the action point for activation isn't actually spent until your full round of work is finished, or that you must make the Craft check immediately upon starting, even though the action won't be finished for a full round. In either case, the Craft check would be made the same round that you spend your action point for activation, so you couldn't spend another action point to boost your check result.

Worse, your GM could legitimately rule that the action point for activation is spent during the whole time your hero is doing the full round of work. In that case, it would count against both the round he started and the round he finished, and you wouldn't be able to spend another action point in either round -- even for an unrelated roll.

If I were the GM, I'd certainly allow the process you describe -- though I might well insist that each round of scientific improvisation count as an attack action (see [Bullet Points: Maneuvers and Actions](#)) for some of the reasons). In general, if a PC really wants to blow 2 action points on one ability (1 point to activate it and another to gain a bonus on any associated roll), and he's willing to take 2 rounds to do it, I would allow it as long as the process made sense to me. Action points are a resource I'm willing to let PCs burn at any rate they wish, subject to the rules. In such a case, however, I would make it clear that I was allowing such usage on a case-by-case basis, to prevent players from looking for ways to abuse the house rule.

 **When figuring out how many dice a character gets when spending an action point, do level adjustments or base Hit Dice (for monsters) count? In other words, if my half-dragon Strong hero 5 spends an action point, does she get 1d6 (for being 4th level) or 2d6 (for being CR 8)?**

You count only actual class levels, just as you do when determining how many feats a hero should have. Since your character is only 5th level, she just gets 1d6, even if other PCs around her are getting 2d6 because they belong to races with lower level adjustments. That inequity is one of the prices you pay for playing a race with a high level adjustment. Furthermore, a monster doesn't get any action points at all unless it has class levels. A typical ogre has no action points, though an ogre Tough hero 3 gets the action points of a Tough hero 3.


And to answer the next obvious question in advance, a character with levels in both an ordinary class and a

heroic class doesn't count her ordinary class levels when determining how many d6 she gets when spending an action point. Since she doesn't receive action points for her ordinary levels, those levels don't count toward the effectiveness of her action points, either.

Why can't I spend an action point when my hero takes 10 or takes 20?

An action point represents a surge of extra effort, concentration, and determination. Using an action point means a character is making a heroic effort -- that's the reason ordinaries don't get action points. Each hero has a limited number of these because no one can be heroic all the time.

Spending an action point represents a special effort. Taking 10, on the other hand, specifically represents handling the task at hand the safe, calm, and easy way. Thus, the two concepts don't mix. The same logic explains why a character can't take 10 in combat or while distracted. Similarly, taking 20 represents a character trying every possible way she can think of to succeed at a task until she either gets it right or discovers that it's beyond her ability. In any case, the slow, methodical process required provides no opportunity for a single surge of heroic effort.

 **I have a problem with my GM. I never get to spend action points, because as soon as I tell the GM what I've rolled, he immediately tells me whether my hero missed or failed. Then, because he's already told me the result of the roll, he doesn't let me spend an action point to alter it. But I never have time to think about whether I want to spend an action point or not, since he gives me the result in a split second. Shouldn't he ask me whether I want to spend an action point, or at least give me a moment to think about it? And if he doesn't, shouldn't he let me spend the action point anyway, since it's his fault I know that the attempt failed?**

For questions of this type, I give a lot of answers that focus on play style and what's right for a given group. In this case, however, I just have to come out and say that you're wrong.

The GM has no way of knowing whether you're thinking about spending an action point. If he paused or asked whether you wanted to do so every time you rolled a d20, the game would slow down (probably a lot), and people would get tired of hearing about action points.

It's your job as a player to keep track of when you might want to spend an action point and ask the GM for a moment to consider it. After all, he has enough to keep track of without trying to read your mind when you tell him you rolled a 17 to hit. So give the matter a moment of thought before telling your GM what you rolled. If you want to keep everyone involved in your thought process, announce what you actually rolled on your d20 and that you're thinking of spending an action point, but don't reveal what your total is with all the bonuses applied until you've decided whether or not to spend your action point.

The point of the "spend after you've rolled" rule is to let a player who rolls a 3 for a Will save realize that her result probably isn't good enough without letting her know for sure. Overall, action points are a great tool. They help players avoid embarrassment and feel heroic even with mediocre die rolls. However, their use can't be allowed to slow down the pace of the entire game.

Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to bulletpoints@wizards.com. For the quickest possible answer, please put the topic of your question in the subject line and keep the question

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as succinct as possible. If you have more than one question, feel free to send two or more emails -- but for best results please include only one question per email unless your questions are very closely related to one another. Please don't expect a direct answer by email. Check back here every other week for the latest batch of answers!

About the Author

Owen Kirker Clifford Stephens was born in 1970 in Norman, Oklahoma. He attended the TSR Writer's Workshop held at the Wizards of the Coast Game Center in 1997 and moved to the Seattle area in 2000, after accepting a job as a Game Designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Fourteen months later, he returned to Oklahoma with his wife and three cats to pick up his freelance writer/developer career. He has author and co-author credits on numerous **Star Wars** and *EverQuest* projects, as well as *Bastards and Bloodlines* from Green Ronin. He also has producer credits for various IDA products, including the Stand-Ins printable figures.

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