



Bullet Points

Basics on Classes

By James Wyatt

Welcome to the latest installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm James Wyatt, designer of a lot of **D&D** books, plus one **d20 Modern** book that's coming out in 2005, though I can't tell you about that one just yet. It's my job to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky issues, and give you a little peek into the minds of the designers (insofar as I can pry their minds open to wrest insight from them).


Every two weeks I'll 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 there are any unrelated but pressing questions in the mailbox, I might tackle them at the end of the column, but only if there's room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.

Basics on Classes


This time around, I've pulled together a number of questions about the basic mechanics of the game -- specifically those involving character classes.

Questions and Answers

We'll start this installment with a question on action points, then move on to Defense and other topics relating to classes.


 I'm a bit confused about how and when to use action points in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*. I understand that I can use them to affect a single d20 roll, but the book also says that I can spend 1 action point to "use a class talent, or class feature" during my turn. Does this passage mean that I have to spend 1 action point to use the bonus feats that each class gets? For example, suppose a 2nd-level Fast hero takes Personal Firearms Proficiency as her bonus feat. Does she then have to spend 1 action point every time she uses that feat? In other words, does she have to take a -4 penalty on her attack rolls with personal firearms unless she uses an action point? Even if that's true, it seems to me that some talents and advanced class feats shouldn't require action points, such as the Tough hero's damage reduction talent. Am I correct in assuming that such passive talents require no action points to "work"?

You don't have to spend an action point to use talents and class features unless it says so in their descriptions. For example, a Fast hero has to spend 1 action point to use the defensive roll talent, and the Martial Artist has to spend 1 action point to use the iron fist class ability. The text about spending an action point to use a class talent or class feature refers only to those situations. I hope that explanation lets you breathe easier.


 I'm confused about how the class bonus to Defense works when a hero levels up. For example, the bonus to Defense for a 1st-level Smart hero is given as +0. When he becomes a Smart Hero 2, this bonus increases to +1. If he then becomes a Smart Hero 3, I assume that his bonus to Defense stays +1, since that's the value given for 3rd level on the Smart hero table. Am I

correct? The book says that you add the bonuses together for a multiclass character, but apparently if a hero stays in the same class, you don't add the bonus from the new level to the previous one. That difference in procedure just somehow doesn't seem correct to me. Can you shine some light this way?

You are correct in assuming that a 3rd-level Smart hero has a class bonus to Defense of +1, not +2. See if it helps to think of it this way: The multiclass character used as an example on page 40 of the rulebook is a Strong hero 4/ Smart hero 2 with a bonus of +4 to Defense (+3 for his Strong levels and +1 for his Smart levels). Had he stayed a single-classed Strong hero, he would have had a bonus of +3 to Defense at 6th level. So his bonus is a little bit better because he took on another class, but it's in the same ballpark as the one from the Strong hero table.

 **Are statistics given anywhere for the basic hero classes (Tough, Fast, and so forth) above 10th level?**

No. The **d20 Modern** game assumes that characters will go beyond the base classes by the time they reach 11th level, either by dipping into another base class or by adopting an advanced class. The base classes are intended to be broad and generic, not to define everything that a character might hope to be. That's why all the sample ordinaries in Chapter Eight of the core rulebook combine two basic classes. Such combinations are, to some degree, more archetypal and closer to what we expect heroic characters to be than the basic classes alone. A football player is not just a Strong hero or a Tough hero -- he's both, and thus a more interesting and well-rounded character than he would have been by sticking to either base class.

 **In the d20 Modern game, every prestige class I've encountered has five levels. Is there some game balance reason for that limit? When I create my own prestige classes, should I limit them to five levels? Would it be poor design to make them longer, or even shorter?**

The reason that a prestige class in the **d20 Modern** game has only five levels is that the designers assume a character has quite a number of levels under her belt by the time she starts advancing in one. In contrast to an advanced class, which a hero can enter at around 4th level, prestige classes usually have prerequisites that require two or more classes, and often some abilities available only through an advanced class.

Look at the Archmage in the ***Urban Arcana Campaign Setting***, for example. The requirements are pretty straightforward: 12 ranks in each of three skills. My D&D-trained mind initially thought, "Gee, you can get into that after only 9 levels in another class and finish the class by 14th level." But that's not so -- a hero can take one of those skills -- Spellcraft -- only after becoming a Mage, and he must be at least 3rd level before he can take a level of Mage. So if your character enters the class as a Smart Hero 3/Mage 12, he's out of levels after finishing five levels of Archmage.

Thus, your first consideration in designing a prestige class is whether or not it requires multiple classes. If you want your class to be accessible to lower-level or single-classed characters, you should probably be thinking about an advanced class instead -- and in that case, you can feel free to go all out with ten levels! But even if it's a true prestige class, there's no reason you have to give it exactly five levels. Some of the other prestige classes in **Urban Arcana** let characters in before 15th level, so they still have room to grow after putting five levels into the prestige class. Essentially, your class is a good design if it has the right number of levels to fit its basic concept and the powers you want to give it.

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 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

James Wyatt is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His design credits include *The Speaker in Dreams*, *Defenders of the Faith*, *Oriental Adventures*, *Deities and Demigods*, *Fiend Folio*, *Draconomicon*, and the *Book of Exalted Deeds*. He wrote the Origins award-winning adventure *City of the Spider Queen* and is one of the designers of the new Eberron campaign setting, which is due out in June 2004. James lives in Kent, Washington with his wife Amy and son Carter.

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