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Did the Barbarian really just make that hand gesture while you're trying to calm down the horde of angry Kobolds?! Oh boy, roll for initiative! Your initiative determines when it's your turn to act during combat. In this article, we cover everything about initiative in 5e DnD - rolling, bonuses, tracking, and more so you can be prepared to take action when the Gray Ooze hits the fan! What is Initiative in D&D 5e? Initiative determines the order of turns in a combat. Hi! This post may contain affiliate links to online stores. If you use a link and buy something, I may get a commission at no extra cost to you. See my affiliate disclosure. Pretty much the first thing you'll do when a fight starts is roll for initiative to see who goes first, second etc. Initiative allows the DM to keep track of each round so that the world does not devolve into chaos and willy-nilly LARping! To clarify, there are two ways of talking about initiative that can get confused: You (the player) have your initiative in an encounter. That's the number you roll plus your Dex modifier and any bonuses you have. Then there's the initiative order. That's the order that everyone involved in the combat gets to take their turn. All the players, monsters, and other NPCs. How Do You Roll for Initiative? Even in a party full of smooth operators and diplomats you're bound to roll for initiative quite a lot, so read on to see how it's done. Standard Way to Roll Initiative As a player, the standard way to roll for initiative looks like this: Make a Dexterity check by rolling 1d20 and adding your Dexterity modifier from the first page of your character sheet. Remember your total, or write it down. Wait for everyone else to do the same. Tell your DM the total. (Keep it classy: wait until you're asked, don't just yell it out!) For DMs, this process gets a bit more complex: Make Dexterity checks for any monsters or NPCs (groups of the same monster can get one blanket initiative roll). Solicit initiative rolls from your players. Note everyone's initiative totals and rank them from highest to lowest. Make decisions on any ties. Present the initiative order to your players. Consider designating one other person to help collect and organize initiative, as it can become overwhelming at a big table. Later, we'll get into more tips on how to keep track of initiative order without wanting to pull your hair out! Other Ways to Roll Initiative The Dungeon Master's Guide gives a few alternatives to the classic roll for initiative. Initiative Score The initiative score method is a static number that you use for every combat. Some DMs just use the character's Dex score, some use 10 + Dexterity modifier (like a passive initiative score). This method has the bonus of allowing you to sit in order for easy turn taking! However, this flat score method means if you have low Dexterity you will pretty much always go last. Sorry, big ol' tank buddy! Side Initiative Side initiative is another simplified system. Players and monsters each comprise a "side," and roll one dice against each other. Whichever side gets the highest number goes first. After that, it's easy: order shifts back and forth between players and monsters. That means all players go one after another, then all monsters, then all players... and so on. Homebrew Ways to Roll Initiative Want to remove some of the random chance, the 1s, and hair-tearing? Some gamers have taken the initiative (heh) to homebrew their own method for combat order. Popcorn Initiative One of the more creative and complex methods is popcorn initiative. Starts the usual way by having everyone roll a Dexterity check. The highest number goes first, then they choose who goes next. And then that person (or DM) chooses the next, and so on until everyone gets a turn. You can pick your party members or monsters, so if you try this way out try getting creative: If a spellcaster gets to go first, consider using a spell that lasts until the end of your next turn. Then let them go last/late in the next round and you can get nearly two full rounds of that spell - serious bang for your buck! Choose to let your healer go before any unconscious allies. That way the Cleric can get you back up on your feet, and ready to go without wasting your turn. Let monsters go first if they aren't ranged or don't have a good line of sight on the party. The baddies won't have many good options: either run in close and leave themselves in melee range, or waste time readying actions. Wait til the end for your DPS (damage per second) character to act, then have her pick herself to go first in the next round. With this back-to-back turn strategy and a little luck, you can take out the biggest issue real quick. Wham bam, thank you ma'am! More Homebrew Initiative Systems Here are a few more of our favorite homebrew initiative methods from around the internet: Drawing names from a hat. True randomization! Use your Wisdom modifier rather than Dexterity for calculating initiative. The flavor here is that those with the quickest minds will act earlier, rather than the quickest hands. Roll initiative every single round. This adds a little more randomization, but also more organizing for the DM. But hey, more dice rolling = more fun! When to Roll Initiative? You roll for initiative when combat starts. It will start when you do things like: Charge at another creature Cast a spell Draw a weapon during negotiations Surprise an unaware foe Say something grating about that drunk Half-Orc across the bar's mother Regardless of how it starts, initiative order must be determined before any combat actions are taken. Think twice before you start waving that greataxe around, because everyone in an encounter rolls to be in initiative order. Yup. Even close bystanders, unconscious party members, and the Paladin who really just wants to talk things out! How Do You Calculate Initiative in 5e? Since initiative rolls are simply Dexterity checks, calculating initiative in 5e looks like this: 1d20 + Dex modifier + relevant bonuses = your initiative How is Initiative Bonus Calculated? Calculating your initiative bonus will be different for each character and may change as you level up. Maybe you've got a class feature like the Swashbuckler Rogue's Rakish Audacity, which allows you to add an ability modifier to rolls for initiative. Or, perhaps you picked the Alert feat which gives a +5 bonus to initiative. It's up to you to make note of any bonuses to initiative your character may have, but there is a handy spot on your character sheet to note it. It's on the first sheet, right between Armor Class and Speed. Initiative bonus box on the Dungeons & Dragons 5e character sheet How to Increase Initiative in 5e Like being in control, don't like surprises? A high initiative bonus can give you the edge. So, let's jump right into all the ways you can increase your chances of getting to act first and fast! Build Your Character for High Initiative Folks who know they want a high initiative from the get-go will need to focus on one ability for the maximum boost: Dexterity! The higher your initial Dex score, the beefier your modifier, the better chance you have at a high initiative roll. Races that give a bonus to Dexterity: Elf (+2) Gnome (Forest +1) Half-Elf (+1) Halfling (+2) Human (+1) Class Features that Increase Initiative in 5e Lots of classes have features that either directly add to a character's initiative, or simply give bonuses to Dexterity checks - especially if your DM lets you get into all the fancy subclasses in the later core rule books! Here's a table of all the classes that get bonuses to their initiative: Class / Subclass Feature Level Affect Source Book Barbarian Feral Instinct 7 advantage on initiative rolls Player's Handbook Bard Jack of All Trades 2+ half proficiency bonus (rounded down) to ability checks Player's Handbook Fighter / Champion Remarkable Athlete 7+ half proficiency bonus (rounded up) to Str, Con, and Dex checks Player's Handbook Ranger / Gloomstalker Dread Ambusher 3+ Wis mod to initiative Xanathar's Guide to Everything Rogue / Swashbuckler Rakish Audacity 3+ Cha mod to initiative Xanathar's Guide to Everything Sorcerer / Wild Magic Tides of Chaos 1 advantage on one ability check per long rest Player's Handbook Warlock / Fiend Patron Dark One's Own Luck 6+ 1d10 to one ability check per short or long rest Player's Handbook Wizard / Divination Portent / Greater Portent 2/14 roll two d20s after long rest, can replace 2 ability check rolls with them (increases to 3d20 at lvl 14) Player's Handbook Wizard / Chronurgy Temporal Awareness 2+ Int mod to initiative Xanathar's Guide to Everything Wizard / War Magic Tactile Wit 2+ Int mod to initiative Xanathar's Guide to Everything class initiative bonuses and 5e Feats That Increase Initiative in 5e Some builds allow you to choose feats during character creation or level up. To our knowledge, there's only one feat that gives you an initiative bonus. Alert Alert Always on the lookout for danger, you gain the following benefits: - You gain a +5 bonus to initiative. - You can't be surprised while you are conscious. - Other creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against you as a result of being hidden from you.



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