

Combat Procedure



This page describes an initiative system most in line with what is called “A.D.D.I.C.T.” or “quantum” initiative. However, as of late March 2024, we are setting out to try an alternative system based on things like (1) the way Gary was reported to have played by the 80s, (2) OSRIC, and (3) Anthony Huso's initiative system. We will update this page as the experiment progresses. If we adapt a new system, we will preserve this current system on another page.

This page provides a clear-cut combat procedure which will allow players to understand the state of the game and make meaningful decisions. If you haven't read it yet, check out [Combat](#) first.

This page is kept as brief as possible on explanatory content to keep it quick to use at the table. For more info, follow page links.

Important notes:

- **Actions resolving on the same segment:** ALWAYS both resolve! So for example, an attack on a spellcaster must hit the segment before the spell finishes in order to interrupt it.¹⁾
- **Sweep attacks:** Remember that these are individual attack routines.

Action list

The following actions are referenced throughout this procedure. They are coded by letter as they appear on DMG 61. It's useful to gradually memorize which actions each letter matches up to because it will help you remember the order they are resolved in. If you're a DM, it will also give you a handy shorthand when noting down action declarations at the table.

- P. [Psionic combat](#). Occurs every segment.
- A. [Avoid](#) engagement (flee, slam door, use magic to escape, etc.) if possible. (See [Avoiding](#) for the types available.)
- B. [Parley](#).
- C. Await action by the other party.
- D. Discharge [missiles](#), use [devices](#), [cast a spell](#), or [turn undead](#).
- E. Non-avoiding movement. Includes [closing](#) to striking range, [charging](#), and any other non-fleeing movement such as repositioning or retrieving an item from a container.
- F. Set weapons against a possible charge.
- G. Strike blows, to kill or [subdue](#).
- H. [Grapple or hold](#).

Phase 1: Reaction check

1. If the DM has notes indicating how the encountered party will react to such an encounter, those are used and no roll is made. Go to the next phase.
2. Otherwise, DM checks [reaction](#) for the opposing party.²⁾³⁾

Phase 2: Surprise check

1. Determine which parties might be surprised. Detection of a party prior to this phase negates the possibility of surprise.⁴⁾
2. One player rolls for their party's [surprise](#), and the DM rolls for the other parties.⁵⁾

Phase 3: Distance check

1. If [encounter distance](#) is obvious to the DM, move to Phase 4.
2. Roll encounter distance.^{6) 7)}

Phase 4: Opening morale check

1. According to the [reaction](#) check table, certain reaction rolls may provoke a morale check right off the bat.
2. Additionally, if the fight is so lopsided there is the question of overwhelming fear, a morale check should be made right off the bat. For example, if 5 light footmen are hired by a 1st level party to help clear out some goblins and an adult red dragon shows up, that's a great time for an automatic morale check.

Phase 5: Surprise resolution

1. Perform phases 6 and 8 in order for the surprising party, one surprise segment at a time until each segment has been resolved.

Special notes

The following are special cases for certain declarations made during surprise. The listed letter code corresponds to the letter code listed under the [action list](#).

- A: This is available even if the combatant is in melee, since the other party is surprised. Indoors, this means that [pursuit](#) rules are checked. Outdoors, this means the encounter is automatically avoided altogether.
- D, F, G, H: A full attack routine is possible in a single segment, as is setting weapons against charge. Combatants who have a [reaction bonus](#) may not be targetable. `reaction_bonus >= surprise_segment` means the combatant is not targetable.
- D: The spell begins to be cast, but will not resolve until after surprise if it takes more segments to cast than are available during surprise.⁸⁾
- E: Moving 1/10th of MV is possible.⁹⁾
- E: A combatant can begin a custom action such as switching weapons (1 segment), manipulating an item (variable), activating a device (variable), or readying an item from the inventory (2 segments or greater, depending on storage location). The action will not resolve until after surprise if it takes more segments to complete than are available during surprise.

Phase 6: Action declarations

1. DM privately notes action declarations for non-player combatants (includes hirelings, but not henchmen).
2. DM rolls to determine first to declare based on roster order. (See [Pre-Expedition Procedure](#).)
3. First player declares an action. For every full 6 seconds of real-life delay, the DM notes that the character will delay 1 segment.^{10) 11)} Once an action is declared, it cannot be changed, but it can be canceled during action resolution.
 - The DM should categorize each declaration into one of the actions in the action list at the top of this page.
 - A combatant can choose to **prepare** one of these actions rather than take it. (See Action Resolution below for what effect this has.)

Phase 7: Initiative check

1. One player rolls for their party's [initiative](#) and the DM rolls for the other parties.
2. Note down the numerals, as they may be needed to determine action resolution order later.
3. If the dice show different numbers, the party rolling higher wins initiative.
4. On ties, no side wins. See the action resolution phases for what happens then.

Phase 8: Action resolution

1. Psionic combat resolves at the top of every segment during this phase.
2. If one side won initiative, resolve all of their actions in the order appearing in the action list at the top of the page, keeping in mind any special out-of-sequence cases as per the previous phase. After that, the losing side's actions are resolved in the same order.
3. On tied initiative, reference the tie rules below to see what happens first.

Preparing actions

If a combatant has declared that they are preparing an action (e.g. "I shoot anything that comes around the corner"), that action "becomes prepared" at the time it would normally resolve. Then, it's triggered when the case defined by the player's declaration occurs. That means if initiative is lost, the chance to prepare is typically lost, since the enemies have already taken their actions.

Regarding spellcasting, the start of spellcasting can be prepared, but the finish cannot. A player can say "my character begins casting if the orc moves", but can't say "my fireball goes off if the orc moves". **Remember that any damage taken on a round causes the spell to be lost, even if the start of casting was delayed!**

Out-of-sequence cases

These are special considerations that will need to be remembered during the round. These should be noted if they are relevant to the round, and kept in mind:

- A: When it is a side's turn to resolve their actions, if a [morale check](#) was triggered for a group of combatants, the DM calculates the morale check, declares the target number, and makes the roll. If the roll indicates a failure result, the group's declared actions are replaced with whatever [avoiding](#) method is indicated. TODO: More detail
- D, G: If the attacker has [multiple attack routines](#) (MAR), they may strike first even if their side lost initiative.¹²⁾ Note that for spellcasting (D) vs melee (G), whether the spell or the first attack completes first depends solely on the G vs D rule below (where speed factor and/or the die face are checked). Also note that MAR does NOT mean that the creature with MAR automatically wins initiative! A losing attack (G) with MAR does NOT come before a winning flee (A), for example. And a losing attack (G) with MAR does not automatically beat a winning spellcast (D) – the below rule on G vs D determines that instead.¹³⁾ Multiple attacks purely allow the creature with multiple attacks to “slot in” an attack just before the enemy's first attack. It does not mean initiative is won entirely.
- D: A [reaction modifier](#) can cause a combatant to shoot first (or simultaneously with the enemy's turn) if $\text{reaction_mod} + \text{initiative} \geq \text{enemy_initiative}$. On the flip side, it can also cause the combatant to shoot last even if their side won initiative if their reaction modifier is negative and $\text{reaction_mod} + \text{initiative} < \text{enemy_initiative}$.
- D vs D: If two spellcasters are targeting each other, initiative is ignored in favor of casting time. If casting time is equal, then the caster with higher initiative finishes their spell first. Otherwise, the spells go off at the same time.
- E vs D: Missile fire and turning always beats charging because the “weapon length” of the missile or turn will be greater than any melee weapon.^{14) 15)}
- G vs D: If a spellcaster is targeted by a melee, the spell might go off after the attack even if the spellcaster won initiative. To determine this, compare casting time to either speed factor (if the weapon has one), or the caster's initiative die result (if the weapon has no speed factor). If the casting time is lower than the speed factor or the caster's initiative die, the spell goes off first. Otherwise, the spell goes off at the same time as the attack, or after.
- E: When a charge is resolved, the target and any other combatants within 1” can choose to expend an [attack routine](#) (if they have one remaining) on a [retaliation attack](#) against the charger(s). In this case, attack and damage resolution is performed in the order of [weapon length](#), with longer weapons attacking first and equal length weapons attacking simultaneously.

Simultaneous resolution

Any time an attack, spell, or whatever goes off at the same time as another action, all actions fully resolve. All spells are cast, all attack dice are rolled.

Resolving ties

During a round with tied initiative, actions are resolved in the order found in the action list at the top of this page, but with the following additional rules:

Speed factor

- Melee weapons with speed factor attack in order of speed factor, low to high. This means that slower weapons may end up unused if their wielder is slain.^{16) 17)}

D vs D

When one side is firing missiles or turning undead (D) and another side is casting a spell or using a device (D):

- Compare caster's side's initiative roll vs casting or device usage time to determine order of resolution (can be simultaneous). ¹⁸⁾

E vs D

When charging (E) a combatant who declared missiles, spellcasting, device usage, or turning (D):

- **VS missiles:** Missiles attack first with their full [rate of fire](#) regardless of at what distance the charge began.
- **VS spell or device:** Time required to charge is compared to casting time segments or time to retrieve and use the device. ¹⁹⁾
- **VS turning:** Turning resolves first.

G vs D

When attacking (G) a combatant who declared spellcasting or device usage (D): ²⁰⁾

- **Weapon w/ speed factor:** ²¹⁾ Compare speed factor vs casting time segments to determine order of resolution (can be simultaneous).
- **Weapon w/o speed factor:** Use same rules as D vs D, listed above.

Multiple attack routines

All of the attack routines being used on the target are resolved using the above rules. ^{TODO: More detail}

Phase 9: Bleeding

1. Any combatants who had [negative hit points](#) at the start of the round lose 1 hit point. Anyone who hits -10 dies.

Phase 10: Recap

1. The DM provides a narrative summary of the events of the round, making sure everyone understands the state of the battle.

Phase 11: Reset or recovery

1. If the combat has not been resolved, the procedure returns to Phase 6: Action declarations.

2. If the combat has been resolved, one turn passes while the survivors recover. No travel or exploration can take place during this turn, but bleeding can be staunched, spells can be cast, prisoners can be tied up, and so on.

1)

Gary on EN World: "The physical attack must occur on the segment before a spell is cast to disrupt it—unless concentration is required to keep the spell going."

2)

DMG 63.

3)

If the opposing party's alignment is unknown to the players (such as in the case of a castle's ruler or an NPC party, the DM should roll this privately. Otherwise, this can often be rolled publicly. This is up to DM style though. The DM might prefer rolling these publicly if they want to avoid saying something like, "... and they get +30% because they know there's a dragon ally in the next room, but your characters don't know that."

4)

DMG 62: "Prior detection negates..."

5)

It's recommended that the DM rolls this publicly even if it reveals info to players that their characters may not have. Surprise is powerful, dangerous, and public rolls legitimize outcomes.

6)

Indoor: DMG 62. Outdoor: DMG ??.

7)

Remember there are different rolls for indoor (no surprise), indoor (surprise), and outdoor (varies by terrain and modified by surprise).

8)

It is possible to complete a spell and begin casting another during surprise if there are remaining surprise segments during which to begin casting.

9)

Charge can be declared, which increases MV by 100% (indoors) or 33.33% (outdoors).

10)

Asking for clarification on the situation from the DM does not count against this timer, but talking to other players does.

11)

Remember that this never allows a combatant to delay casting a spell so as to not lose it from damage if struck in an early segment. Spells are always lost if the caster is hit during a round before they finish casting.

12)

DMG: 62-63.

13)

Making MAR automatically win would make it impossible for a spellcaster to finish even a 1 segment spell vs a MAR fighter who hits, and initiative would not matter; this is undesirable.

14)

The missile user may choose to fire their missiles at whatever point/range they desire during the charge.^{Ex}

15)

Remember that the target of the turn must be able to see the holy symbol.

16)

Attacks without speed factor, including monster attacks which use claws, teeth, slime, breath, and so on, always resolve on tie rounds.

17)

Speed factor is ignored during a charge; only weapon length is considered.

18)

Note that this means a higher initiative roll is better. For example, rolling a 5 means that any spell taking 1-4 segments to cast could be completed before the spellcaster was attacked.

19)

Remember that on charge, the charger moves 1/10th of their charge MV every segment, and the charger must end the segment at a distance equal to or less than their weapon length in order to attack.

20)

Spells are lost if the caster is hit, but device usage can still happen normally assuming the wielder is still alive.

21)

Includes missile weapons.

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