



D&D® ADVENTURERS LEAGUE

DM'S GUIDE

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WHAT IS THIS?

This document is a guide to getting started Dungeon Mastering games within the D&D Adventurers League, an official organized play program for Dungeons & Dragons.

Companions to this document include the **D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide**.

This document covers Dungeon Mastering D&D Adventurers League adventures in the following campaign worlds: the Forgotten Realms, Eberron, Ravenloft, Dragonlance, Planescape, and Critical Role.

PREPARING TO DUNGEON MASTER

Being a D&D Adventurers League DM is easy and fun. Most of the adventures can be prepared in a short period of time, and you don't have to create all sorts of background material.

WHAT YOU NEED TO RUN A GAME

In order to run a game as a DM in D&D Adventurers League games, you'll need the following:

D&D Basic Rules. This [PDF document](#) is free on the Wizards of the Coast website and contains all the basic rules of the game. For a more complete experience, we recommend you use a fifth edition *D&D Player's Handbook*.

Adventures. Besides their players, the most important thing that a DM needs is an adventure to run. See the "Adventures Available" section for more information.

If you're running games at a public event, check with the event's organizer to see what adventures they have scheduled. Otherwise, adventures are available for purchase at your local gaming store (official D&D products), though digital partners, or online at the [DMsGuild](#).

Players. Play is designed for a table of five players but is easily adjusted to as few as three to as many as seven players. Tables smaller or larger than this might provide a suboptimal play experience and aren't recommended.

GROUP COMPOSITION

There's no general rule that requires members of a group be of the same level. However, the adventure you're running may have limitations that your players must abide by.

Official D&D Adventures. These adventures usually have a wide level range that spans multiple tiers (levels 1-10, etc.). If a character is within the adventure's level range when they begin the adventure, they can continue to play it if they advance outside of it.

D&D Adventurers League Adventures. These adventures usually coincide with the four tiers of play and typically take between 2-8 hours to complete. Characters can only play this adventure if they're within the adventure's level range. Epic adventures usually have multiple "tracks" that accommodate multiple tiers; a character must be within the tier prescribed by the track to play it.

OPTIONAL ITEMS

These things aren't required but are nice to have:

Monster Manual. While the statistics for most monsters can be found here, special monsters created specifically for a given season's published adventure are found in that product. As a general rule, official D&D Adventurers League adventures contain the stat blocks for all monsters featured.

Dungeon Master's Guide. This book contains valuable advice on preparing and running games. It also contains descriptions of magic items that might be awarded during the course of play, so it is suggested that you bring that information with you to the table if it is not provided in the adventure.

Dungeon Master Screen. Helpful to hide the adventure and your notes and schemes from the players.

Miniatures and Map Surfaces. If you and your players enjoy playing a more tactical game of D&D, you can use these to help depict combats and detailed areas.

Virtual Tabletop. If you're playing virtually, you might want to use a virtual tabletop to run your game session.

ADVENTURES AVAILABLE

Many adventures are available for play as a part of the D&D Adventurers League, including official D&D book products, digital-only official D&D Adventurers League releases, and community-created adventures compatible with the program. Most of the adventures listed below can be found for purchase at the [DMsGuild](#).

Official D&D Products. Most of the book and boxed set adventure products have been adapted for play as a part of the D&D Adventurers League; each campaign has its own list of what's available. Available adapted official products are listed in the **D&D Adventurers League Adaptation Guide**.

Official D&D Adventurers League. These include adventures with the "official" logo on the cover or title page. Older adventures use the codes "DDAL," "DDEX," or "DDEP." They are typically playable in two to four hours each (higher level adventures might be six or eight hours long).

Premier Organizer Adventures. A select number of premier event organizers have adventures available for play as a part of a specific D&D Adventurers League campaign world. These are available on the DMsGuild as community-created adventures.

Dungeons & Dragons Adventures. These are adventures created by the community at-large and for sale on the DMsGuild through the Dungeons & Dragons program in the community-created adventures section, using guidelines that are refreshed annually alongside a new storyline season.

SEASONS & CAMPAIGNS

D&D Adventurers League adventures are sometimes further divided into storyline seasons. Each storyline season consists of some number of official D&D Adventurers League adventures plus associated adapted official D&D products.

The term “campaign” is used to refer to the campaign world available for play. The current campaigns are: Forgotten Realms, Eberron, Ravenloft, Dragonlance, Planescape, and Critical Role.

Dreams of the Red Wizards. In addition to the storyline seasons that are linked to specific book product, a meta-storyline called *Dreams of the Red Wizards* offers its own storyline seasons within the Forgotten Realms campaign. *Dreams of the Red Wizards* is optimized for public play such as in stores or at conventions and integrates many official D&D products into a narrative that takes characters to 20th level.

RUNNING ADVENTURES

You Dungeon Master one group of players at a time. Each player must have their own character within the adventure’s level range.

FACILITATOR OF FUN

You have the most important role. You guide the narrative and bring the words on the pages of the adventure to life. While guiding the players, it is also your responsibility to make everyone feel welcomed at the table creating a fun and fair environment. Here are some things to keep in mind.

YOU ARE EMPOWERED

Make decisions about how the group interacts with the adventure; adjust or improvise but maintain the adventure’s spirit. The setting, general story, and prominent NPCs of the adventure should remain largely the same; if an adventure introduces the characters to Cassyt, the plucky acolyte of Kelemvor that resides in Phlan, your players should experience that as well. Less important details, such as the time of year, minor NPCs, or the weather can be tailored to your group.

CHALLENGE YOUR PLAYERS

Gauge the experience level of your players, as well as what they enjoy in a game and attempt to deliver what they’re after; everyone should be able to shine.

You can adjust an encounter’s difficulty by adding or removing thematically appropriate monsters but can’t create new monsters or modify them in such a way that modifies their challenge rating (aside from changing their hit points within the range afforded by their hit dice).

Be careful of going too far, however. The intent is to have a collaborative and challenging story-telling experience; it’s not to do everything you can to kill your players’ characters.

Similarly, destroying equipment generally shouldn’t happen unless an encounter specifically directs you to. In fact, unless they have conditions detailing their destruction (such as an *iron stone*), permanent magic items can’t be destroyed.

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE PLAYERS

If a player is acting in a disruptive manner during a play session, attempt to address the issue as soon as it becomes clear that someone (including you) might be uncomfortable. Take the player aside and explain why the behavior might be causing others to feel uncomfortable. If the problem persists, and your game is a part of an event or store play program, contact the staff for help with resolution.

Disruptive Magic Items. There are several magic items (and a few pieces of gear) within the context of play of certain adventures that might become disruptive to the overall enjoyment of others at the table. If a magic item’s use through play leads to an uncomfortable play experience, take the player aside and explain the issue. You may wish to discuss temporarily removing the item from the character’s carried magic items and allowing them to choose another item from their magic items to bring along instead. You may choose to review a character’s magic items prior to play to help identify any potential issues, but you should not mandate removal of magic items or gear solely on your preferences. There is a small list of items that are banned from D&D Adventurers League play found in the FAQ that address broadly problematic rewards for public play.

SAFETY TOOLS

Safety tools help ensure players aren’t pushed beyond their comfort levels. These tools let your players know you want them to have a positive experience. Some common safety tools are provided below, each with a summary of how they work. An [article about one such safety kit](#) is provided to help with further information. Ensure that you discuss these tools with your players before the game:

- **Code of Conduct.** This is a group agreement for play. It outlines desired and prohibited behaviors, confidential reporting, and possible consequences.
- **Pregame and Postgame Discussions.** Use time before the game to explain content warnings, set boundaries, and collaborate on a safety plan. Then decompress and discuss improvements at the end of the game.
- **Be Welcoming.** Welcome and encourage respectful and open conversations about issues as they arise. Show that you’re listening by avoiding defensive responses.
- **Confidentiality.** Provide contact information for private and confidential conversations between players and DM. Only disclose another player’s name if that player gave unpressured permission for you to do so.
- **Safety Tools.** Learn about the safety tools that TTRPG community members have created and compiled. A broad range of such safety tools are available for you and your players online, or you can get more information by reaching out to your event organizer or community@dndadventurersleague.org.

KEEP THE GAME MOVING

If the game gets bogged down, provide hints and clues to your players facing puzzles or engaging in combat and roleplay interactions that get frustrating. This gives players “little victories” for making good choices based on clues

received. When playing within a given time constraint, such as at a convention, it is important to gauge the pacing of your game. It's okay to make adjustments when you get bogged down to promote a play experience that feels complete.

RUNNING THE GAME

As the DM, you are charged with not only guiding the story, but also fairly adjudicating the game's rules and rewarding your players' characters for their accomplishments.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

Adventurers League play uses fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. You can issue rulings to your table when the rules of the game are ambiguous or vague, but you must otherwise adhere to the rules as they are provided in the core rulebooks and can't change them or make up your own; "house-rules" aren't permitted for use. You must always use the most current incarnation of a rule.

Further, the options and variant rules listed below from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and chapter 2 of *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* are available for your use; others aren't permitted without campaign documentation. In all cases, you should let your group know if you're going to use one or more of these rules if their use would be applicable to the adventure or when the situation arises.

- Variant: Playing on a Grid (*DMG*)
- Variant: Skills with Different Abilities (*DMG*)
- Simultaneous Effects (*XGE*)
- Falling (*XGE*)
- Sleep (*XGE*)
- Adamantine Weapons (*XGE*)
- Tying Knots (*XGE*)
- Tool Proficiencies (*XGE*)
- Spellcasting (*XGE*)

While they aren't official rules that must be followed, the Sage Advice column or discussions with other DMs on your favorite social media platform can provide good insight on how others adjudicated a particular issue. The rules as written in the rulebooks always take precedence; exceptions are noted in official D&D Adventurers League resources, such as the FAQ.

DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES

As a general rule, characters can use downtime activities between or during sessions. However, if you feel that no sufficient periods of inactivity exist to justify it, you can disallow a character using a downtime activity during a session. For example, the journey from Phlan to Waterdeep is very long, so it's reasonable to assume that the characters can spend downtime days copying spells. But the trip from one end of Waterdeep to the other is shorter—only hours. Be fair and consistent in exercising this discretion.

DEATH, DISEASE, AND CURSES

Adventuring is a risky job, and bad things often happen to adventurers. Diseases, poisons, and other similar effects persist until they're removed or at the end of the adventure,

but characters can spend gold to receive spellcasting services during the adventure to remove negative effects.

NPC Spellcasting Services. Characters can receive spellcasting services from an NPC located anywhere that is at least town-sized (1000 or more residents) or has a specific NPC able to cast the spell(s) needed. In addition, the characters must be able to travel there in order to receive services during an adventure. Otherwise, characters follow the rules for post-adventure recovery as listed in the **D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide**. Spellcasting services provided by NPCs are limited to the spells on this list.

Spell Scrolls. Characters can purchase *spell scrolls* during an adventure if the NPC has access to the spell; lower-level (1st and 2nd level) *spell scrolls* may have multiples available for purchase; higher-level *spell scrolls* (3rd to 5th level) are limited to one *spell scroll* maximum for each spell listed, subject to your discretion. See Appendix A: Shared Campaigns in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* for *spell scroll* purchase prices. *Spell scrolls* above 5th level are not available for purchase in this manner.

SPELLCASTING SERVICES AVAILABLE

| Spellcasting Service | Cost |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Cure wounds</i> | 10 gp |
| <i>Identify</i> | 20 gp |
| <i>Lesser restoration</i> | 40 gp |
| <i>Prayer of healing</i> | 40 gp |
| <i>Dispel magic</i> | 90 gp |
| <i>Remove curse</i> | 90 gp |
| <i>Speak with dead</i> | 90 gp |
| <i>Divination</i> | 210 gp |
| <i>Greater Restoration</i> | 450 gp |
| <i>Raise dead</i> | 1,000 gp |
| <i>Resurrection</i> | 3,000 gp |
| <i>True resurrection</i> | 30,000 gp |

Shelter of the Faithful Background Feature. Characters with the Shelter of the Faithful background feature can request NPC spellcasting services at a temple dedicated to their chosen deity. While the service of casting the spell is free, the characters must pay the cost of any material component consumed by casting the spell. These characters can't procure free services for others; only themselves. You determine, using the adventure as a guide, if a specific temple devoted to that character's deity exists within the scope of the adventure.

CHARACTER REWARDS

You award the players rewards for their accomplishments in the form of levels, gold, and magic items for their characters, which they record before leaving the table.

Advancement. If the adventure has specific leveling instructions, follow those. If it does not, award the opportunity to gain a level after completing a session of play that's at least two hours long. A character can gain no more than one level per session. Players can always decline to have their character gain a level that is offered.

Magic Items. Characters can use and keep any magic item they find that is specifically mentioned in the encounter in which it's found (items that the adventure describes as being lent to the characters or destroyed can't be kept). At the end of the session, each character can keep any of magic items found during the adventure. They may only bring a limited number of these magic items to a session of play as noted in the **D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide**.

Some adventures direct you to roll on a Magic Item Table in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Please see the specific guidance as presented in that adventure's adaptation. Others direct you or the player to choose the magic item; these items are selected from either the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the adventure itself. If the adventure does not specify the rarity of the item (such as most randomly rolled items), it must be appropriate to the tier of the character receiving it, as follows. Reroll any items that exceed a character's tier.

UNSPECIFIED ITEM RARITY

| Tier | Maximum Rarity | Tier | Maximum Rarity |
|------|----------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | Uncommon | 3 | Very rare |
| 2 | Rare | 4 | Legendary |

Mundane Equipment and Treasure. Mundane equipment found during the adventure can be used and divided up as the characters decide at the end of the session.

Treasure (including items that have a monetary value but are not equipment, such as art objects and gems) is awarded as the adventure directs. It can be spent during the session; any remaining treasure at the end of the session is converted to gold pieces and divided equally among the characters. If the adventure does not have treasure awarded in this fashion (such as some official D&D Adventurers League adventures), you may add a treasure reward as appropriate either during play or at the end of the session. Use the following table for guidance.

UNSPECIFIED TREASURE ALLOWANCE PER SESSION

| Adventure Level | Minimum | Maximum |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Levels 1-4 (Tier 1) | 100 gp | 500 gp |
| Levels 5-10 (Tier 2) | 1000 gp | 5000 gp |
| Levels 11-16 (Tier 3) | 10,000 gp | 50,000 gp |
| Levels 17-20 (Tier 4) | 50,000 gp | 100,000 gp |

Story Awards. These items or effects—designated in the adventure or adaptation materials—are important to a storyline and are only useable during sessions of the storyline or book adventure in which they're awarded. These items don't count against a character's carried magic item limit, and in the case of items, may only be possessed by one character in the party during play.

REWARDS FOR OFFICIAL ADVENTURES

If you are Dungeon Mastering an official adventure such as *The Wild Beyond the Witchlight* or *Dragons of Stormwreck Isle* in the *D&D Starter Set*, you'll need to consult the adaptation material for that product to see how to handle rewards, including advancement. Some of the adaptations also provide guidance in splitting up the adventure into two- or four-hour sessions.

You can find the adaptations of official D&D product in the **D&D Adventurers League Adaptation Guide** (see link below).

QUESTIONS AND MORE INFO

The following resources are available to you to keep up with all the latest Adventurers League news and discussion!

- [D&D Beyond Adventurers League Article Hub](#). Your source for news and regular updates about what's going on with Adventurers League.
- [D&D Beyond Adventurers League Forum](#). Containing the pinned "Adventurers League Resources & Links," which serves as the file repository for everything you need!
- [Official D&D Adventurers League Discord](#). Join in the lively discussion with channels devoted to all sorts of topics! All the latest news gets pushed here too.