VARIANT RULES

More campaign options for the discerning DM

Designed, edited, and compiled by B.A. Morrier



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The following are variant rules, core rule reminders, and campaign options for the discerning DM. The author has over 25 years of experience playing the game and enjoys fiddling with the rules and adapting stuff from older editions.

RACIAL ATTRIBUTES

Darkvision: Racial darkvision can be treated as a form of low-light vision that requires a minimum of light.

Light Source	Normal vision	Darkvision 60 ft.
No light	Blinded	Blinded
source		
Full moon,	Dim light	Bright light
twilight, dawn		
Partial moon	Blinded	Dim light, 60 ft.
Underground	Dim light, 5-ft.	Bright light, 5-ft.
Glowcap	radius	radius
Mushroom		Dim light + 60 ft.
Glowing Moss	Bright light, 5-ft.	Bright light 10-ft.
(single patch)	Dim light + 5 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Candle	Bright light, 5-ft.	Bright light 10 ft.
-	Dim light + 5 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Torch	Bright light, 20-ft.	Bright light 40 ft.
_	Dim light + 20 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Lamp	Bright light 15-ft.	Bright light 45 ft.
	Dim light + 30 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft
Lantern,	Bright light 60-ft.	Bright light 120 ft.
Bullseye	cone	cone
-	Dim light + 60 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Lantern,	Bright light 30-ft.	Bright light 60 ft.
Hooded	Dim light + 30 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Continual	Bright light 20-ft.	Bright light 40 ft.
Flame	Dim light + 20 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Dancing Lights	Dim light 10-ft.	Bright light 10-ft.
- 1.1		Dim light + 60 ft.
Daylight	Bright light 60-ft.	Bright light 120 ft.
	sphere	sphere
	Dim light + 60 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.
Faerie Fire	Dim light, 10 ft.	Bright light, 10-ft.
	D 1 1 1 1 1	Dim light + 60 ft.
Light	Bright light 20-ft.	Bright light 40 ft.
	Dim light + 20 ft.	Dim light + 60 ft.

If you have darkvision 60 ft., you can see the dim light a light source casts as if it were bright light, and the darkness within an additional 60 feet of you as if it were dim light. That area of darkness is only lightly obscured as far as that creature is concerned (i.e., disadvantage on Wisdom Perception checks that rely on sight).

Magical darkvision works as RAW.

Sunlight Sensitivity. All creatures with darkvision have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight when they, or whatever they are trying to perceive, is in direct sunlight.

Halflings and Gnomes (summary)

- Small Size
- Between 3½ and 4½ feet tall, average 50 pounds.
- You can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than yours.
- You can hide behind creatures of larger size (granting you **cover**).
- You have disadvantage on attack rolls with heavy weapons.
- You maximum natural Strength score is 18.

ABILITY SCORES

Unlike other abilities, the following abilities can't be raised with normal ability score increases. Instead, the DM awards increases to Courage and Sanity – or impose reductions – based on a character's action.

COURAGE

Measures a character's grit, nerve, and bravery when confronted with fear, danger, pain, grief, or overwhelming odds.

Whenever a spell or situation calls for a Wisdom saving throw or ability check related to fear or morale, Courage is used instead.

A character's initial Courage score is determined by rolling 4d6, dropping the lowest die, and adding his or her Wisdom modifier.

COMELINESS

Comeliness reflects physical attractiveness, social grace, hygiene, and personal beauty of the character. It is used to determine initial reactions to the character, and characters with high comeliness may affect the wills and actions of others. While charisma deals specifically with leadership and interactions between characters, comeliness deals with attractiveness and first impressions. Comeliness helps determining your **Passive Charisma,** which—for humanoid races affects other humanoids, giants, and bipedal creatures of human-like form and motivation. A character's Comeliness score is chosen by the player upon character creation (maximum 18).

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Comeliness	Modifier
Repulsive	-5
Ugly	-3
Homely	-1
Plain or Average	0
Pretty	+1
Beautiful	+3
Stunning	+5
Otherworldly	+7
	Repulsive Ugly Homely Plain or Average Pretty Beautiful Stunning

Passive Charisma = 10 + your Charisma modifier + your Comeliness modifier

Passive Charisma

3 or lower: Disgust, evidenced by a tendency to look away or revile the individual. The starting attitude of a creature viewing the character generally shifts from friendly to indifferent, or from indifferent to hostile. However, some viewers of evil alignment can regard low comeliness as positive.

4 to 7: Aversion and a desire to be away from the character. If given an excuse, attitude will quickly shift from indifferent to hostile, and tend toward rejection.

8 to 10: Plain to average first appearance. The reaction tends toward unease or an indifferent attitude.

11 to 12: Pleasant and agreeable first appearance. Starting attitude, unless given an excuse for hostility, is usually indifferent or friendly.

13 to 14: Interest in viewing the individual is evidenced by those in contact, as he or she is good-looking and/or has a captivating presence. Individuals attracted by the character might seek him or her out or have a flirtatious attitude. Starting attitude is generally friendly.

15 and above: The appearance and grace of the character causes heads to turn and hearts to race. Starting attitude of individuals attracted to the character will generally shift from hostile to indifferent, and indifferent to friendly. At the DM's discretion, advantage might be granted on the first Charisma check following interaction.

The DM can apply racial adjustments to Passive Charisma when the reaction of characters of other races is concerned.

Examples of possible racial adjustments:

Beastly races: -4 ; Half-orcs: -2 Dwarves and Gnomes: -1 ; Elves: +1 ; Half-dryads +2

SKILLS

Strength

ATHLETICS (SWIMMING)

Characters without the Athletics skill proficiency never learned to swim. They must succeed Strength checks in order to stay afloat or swim (swimming speed 5), even in calm water.

Swimming speed for player characters with Athletics proficiency is 10 (Small size) or 15 (Medium size). Gaining any distance in rough water (treacherous currents, storm-tossed waves, or areas of thick seaweed) requires a successful Strength (Athletics) check, unless a creature has a natural or magical Swimming Speed (e.g. aquatic elf, merfolk). If the Armor table in the PHB shows "Disadvantage" in the Stealth column, the wearer has disadvantage on Strength (Athletics) checks related to swimming.

If a character fails three Swimming checks in a row, it is out of breath and starts drowning.

A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + its Constitution modifier (minimum 30 seconds). When a creature runs out of breath, it can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round). At the start of its next turn, it drops to 0 hit points and is dying. (RAW)

LEARNING TO SWIM

You can spend time between adventures learning to swim. The training lasts 30 days and costs 30 gp. It grants the character a situational Strength (Athletics) skill proficiency for swimming.

Dexterity

OPEN LOCKS

• You have tools and you're proficient with them: roll Dexterity check with proficiency bonus

• You have tools and you're not proficient with them: roll Intelligence check DC 10 and Dexterity check with disadvantage.

• You don't have tools, but you're proficient with them: you have to get some improvising tools, but you know what's best for the job. You roll Dexterity check with disadvantage.

• You don't have tools and you're not proficient with them: good luck. You have to get some improvising tools, and you succeed on a natural 20 on a d20 roll.

USE ROPE

RAW: DC 17 Strength check to burst out of ropes. You can wriggle free of bonds by making a Dexterity check against a typical Difficulty Class. (PHB p. 177)

You can bind a character or an object by making a Dexterity check. The DM secretly rolls the check and adds any Rope Kit proficiency bonus. This determines the knot's DC.

A character with the following race, class or background has proficiency with the **Rope kit**.

Rope Kit Proficiency

Race: Lightfoot halfling Classes: Bard, Ranger, Rogue Backgrounds: Criminal, Outlander, Sailor, Pirate, Urchin (others at DM's discretion)

Rope Kit. This kit is an organized collection of rope sizes, pre-cut and ready to use. A rope kit is made from a 100-foot silk rope. It includes:

- 8 x 3-foot segments
- 4 x 6-foot segments
- 2 x 12-foot segments
- 1 x 25-foot segment

If you have rope kit proficiency, then you are assumed to have —along with your adventuring gear —the rope you need in a survival situation. The DM might impose a 15 gp cost if you didn't mention purchasing the rope kit ahead of time.

Intelligence / Wisdom

LANGUAGES

This house rule replaces the PHB starting languages and Linguist feat, and the languages of ethnicities described in the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide.

In our campaign, the Common tongue is divided into three main dialects: **Chondathan** (northern and central lands of Faerûn), **Guran** (e.g. Chult, Calimshan and other southern lands), and **Shou** (e.g. Kara-Tur, far eastern lands).

At level 1, your character knows one native language (Chondathan, Dwarvish, Elvish, Orc, etc.), and your background can give you access to one or more additional languages.

However, the maximum number of languages you can know at any given time is limited by your Intelligence score, as shown on the following table.

INT	Max	Note
1-5	0	Understands 1
6-7	1	Speak
8-9	1	Speak
10-11	2	Speak, Read
12-13	3	Speak, Read, Write
14-15	4	Speak, Read, Write
16-17	6	Speak, Read, Write
18-19	8	Speak, Read, Write
20	10	Speak, Read, Write

LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

You can spend time between adventures learning a new language. First, you must find an instructor willing to teach you. The training lasts a minimum of 150 days and costs 1 gp per day. After 150 days, you make an Intelligence check with the following DC:

SCRIPT	DC
Common: Chondathan	10
Common : Guran	15
Common: Shou	18
DWARVISH	15
Elvish	15
Infernal	18
Celestial	18
Draconic	18
Thieve's cant	15
Druidic	15

You have advantage on the check if the language you are trying to learn shares a common script with a previously known language. A failed roll indicates the need to spend another 50 days learning the language, followed by a new Intelligence check. Each subsequent failed check requires you to take an additional 50 days of training.

MEMORY

Your Intelligence (Memory) check measures your ability to recall recent information.

The DM might call for a Memory check when you try to remember an event, a piece of information, a magical command word, a name, a place, or the identity of a person (or a group) you have met in the course of the current campaign. What other Intelligence skills cover: **Arcana:** Ancient mysteries, magic traditions, arcane symbols, cryptic phrases, constructs, dragons, magical beasts and monstrosities, the Weave, spells, magic items, magical traps, magical writing, the Planes.

House Rule. Proficiency in the Arcana skill is required to learn a magical item's properties and the way to use them during a short rest. Potions remain the exception; a little taste is often enough to tell the taster what the potion does.

Attuning to an item requires a creature to spend a short rest focused on only that item while being in physical contact with it. A creature can spend only one Hit Dice to recover hit points when spending a short rest for attunement. Also, as RAW, this can't be the same short rest used to learn the item's properties. See DMG for complete attunement rules.

History: Royalty, wars, constructions, political figures, folk heroes, legends, laws, local lore, customs, traditions, lineages, heraldry, genealogy, types of government, towns, cities, and countries.

Nature: Beasts, humanoids, fey, giants, the Underdark, the wilderness, vermin, weather, lands, terrain, climate, herbs and plants.

Religion: Deities, pantheons, myths, religious legends, heroes and mystics, ecclesiastic traditions, religious customs, theocracies, superstitions, holy feasts, domains and symbols, the undead, shamanism, prayers, sacred rites, sacred places, angels and demons.

FEATS

DECK BRAWLER

Prerequisite: Sailor Background (includes variants) Accustomed to fighting on ships, barges or anything else that floats, you gain the following benefits:

• Increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

• You gain a +2 bonus to initiative while standing on anything that is floating on water.

• Climbing doesn't halve your speed.

• You can add your proficiency bonus to any check that involves boarding another sea vessel.

GAMBLER

• Increase your Dexterity or Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

• You gain proficiency in two gaming sets of your choice.

HEALER (Replaces PHB Healer feat) Prerequisite: Proficiency with Medicine skill You are a skilled herbalist, healer, and surgeon. and gain the following benefits:

• Proficiency with the Herbalism kit.

• Whenever you use an action and spend a use of a healer's kit on a target, the target may spend 1 hit dice. If they do, the target heals damage as if they'd spent the hit dice at the end of a short rest.

• Whenever you spend a use of a healer's kit to stabilize a dying creature, that creature regains a number of hit points equal to either your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier (your choice).

• Once per day after a short or long rest, you may expend a use of a healer's kit to grant a creature a bonus saving throw against one disease or one condition currently affecting it at the end of that short rest. The condition can be blinded, deafened, paralyzed, or poisoned. The saving throw gains a bonus equal to your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier (your choice). The DC of the saving throw equals the DC of the spell or effect that initiated the disease or condition. If used during a long rest, you may grant this bonus save to a number of creatures equal to either your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier (your choice). Each creature treated during a long rest requires one use of a healer's kit.

MARTIAL ADEPT (PHB p. 168)

You can take the Martial Adept feat a second time with the following benefits:

- You learn two additional maneuvers;
- You gain another superiority die;

MASTER HERBALIST

You are an expert at locating, preparing, and administering herbs. You gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on Intelligence (Nature) checks to gather herbs for herbal concoctions.
- You have advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) checks to prepare concoctions of the Healing type.

• You have resistance to nonmagical poison damage.

NIMBLE

Prerequisite: Dexterity 13 or higher

You are built for speed, so you are built to get out of the way of an attack. Gain the following benefits:

• Add +1 bonus to your AC while you are wearing light or no armor. This stacks with any other effect that add to your AC.

• You can take the disengage action as a bonus action on each of your turns.

• You gain a superiority die (d6). Using this superiority die, you can use the Give Ground maneuver (see New Maneuvers section) as a reaction. You regain your expended superiority die when you finish a short or long rest.

PUGILIST

You are trained in one of several weaponless combat techniques and gain the following benefits: • You have studied the detailed anatomy of your opponents, intimidate them with your unshakable confidence, are able to pinpoint weak spots with a keen eye, or use your high pain tolerance to power through your enemy's defenses. Choose an ability score. You may use that ability score in place of Strength for the attack and damage rolls of your unarmed strikes.

• When you take the Attack action on your turn, you can make an additional unarmed strike as a bonus action.

• Your unarmed damage increases by one die type. For example, from 1 point to 1d4, or 1d10 to 1d12.

You can select this feat multiple times. You unarmed damage increases by one die type.

SKIRMISHER'S STEALTH

Prerequisite: Dexterity 13 or higher

Your combine speed and stealth in combat to make yourself hard to pin down. You are difficult to detect even if you attack or otherwise take actions that would normally reveal your presence.

• Increase your Dexterity or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

• At the start of your turn, pick a creature you are hidden from. You remain hidden from that creature during your turn, regardless of your actions or the actions of other creatures. As a bonus action at the end of your turn, you can make a Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide again if you fulfill the conditions needed to hide. Otherwise, creatures are aware of you at the end of your turn.

WHIP MASTER

You have practiced extensively with a whip: • Increase your Dexterity score by 1, to a max. of 20.

• When you hit a creature with a whip on your turn, you can use a bonus action to attempt to Grapple, Trip or Disarm the target. If you do so, the attack does not cause any damage. Target makes a Strength saving throw DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your STR or DEX modifier (the same one you used to make the attack roll).

Alternatively, you can use your action to interact with objects within whip reach. E.g., you can pull small items to you, flip switches, hit buttons, grasp onto an object like a grappling hook. As a bonus action, you can release the object the whip is grasping.

HEALING, INJURIES AND RECOVERY

• A PC rolls once for hp per level. If the rolled number is lower than average, take average hp.

• Characters don't regain hit points at the end of a long rest. Instead, they can spend Hit Dice to heal at the end of a long rest, just as with a short rest. (DMG p. 267)

• When reduced to 0 hp, the character gains a level of exhaustion.

• One failed death saving throw equals a roll on the Lingering Injuries table (DMG p. 272).

HEALER'S KIT

As a house rule, any individual can spend one use of a healer's kit to stabilize a companion. If you have proficiency in the Medicine skill, you gain the following benefits when using a healer's kit.

• When you use a healer's kit to stabilize an ally, that ally also regains 1 hit point.

• During a short rest, you may expend one use of a healer's kit to bind wounds, offer pain-numbing salves, and apply natural anticoagulants. The target heals 1d6+4 hit points of damage. The target also gain a number of hit points equal to its number of hit dice.

MASSIVE ENERGY DAMAGE

When you take acid, cold, fire or lightning damage in a single turn equal to or greater than half your hit points maximum, you must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer a debilitating pain equal to one level of exhaustion. You also lose your action and you can't take reactions until the end of your next turn. You recover all levels of exhaustion gained because of this type of damage if you receive magical healing.

AGING EFFECT

Child: -4 Str, -2 Con, and Wis Middle age: -1 to Str, Dex, Con and +1 to Int, Wis Old age: -2 to Str, Dex, Con and +1 to Int, Wis Venerable age: -3 to Str, Dex, Con and +1 to Int, Wis

EXTREME COLD (Replaces RAW: DMG)

At the end of an hour exposed to extreme cold, a creature must succeed a Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

Temperature	Save DC
0 degrees Fahrenheit (-20 Celsius)	10*
-20 degrees Fahrenheit (-30 Celsius)	12*
-40 degrees Fahrenheit (-40 Celsius)	15**
-60 and below (-50 Celsius)	20**

* Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage, creatures naturally adapted to cold climates, or creatures wearing cold weather gear automatically succeed on the saving throw.

** Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage and creatures naturally adapted to cold climates automatically succeed on the saving throw.

COMBAT

MULTIPLE OBJECT INTERACTIONS

You can interact with two objects or features of the environment for free (instead of one as RAW): e.g. draw two swords; draw a bow and kick open a door; drink the ale in a flagon and grab a bauble from the table.

Unslinging your backpack, opening it, and retrieving an object counts as an interaction with two objects.

You still need to take the **Use An Object** action when the object itself requires a full action to have any effect (e.g. drinking a magical potion, using a tinker device).

HERO POINTS

At the start of a gaming session, each player receives a d6 heroic die. This d6 can be added to any one roll – attack, damage, ability check, saving throw, etc. The die can be rolled *after* seeing the result of the initial die roll.

The DM can grant another heroic die when awarding Inspiration (instead of advantage).

Heroic dice must be used during the current gaming session. Unlike the d20 Inspiration die, they are not carried from one session to the next and cannot be given to another player.

COVER

Half-cover or three-quarter cover imposes the same penalty : disadvantage on the attack roll.

CRITICAL DAMAGE

When rolling critical damage, the original die is always maxed and you only roll for the additional damage. For example, a crit with a longsword deals 8+1d8+modifiers damage.

DISARM

If you don't know the disarming attack maneuver: as written in the DMG (attack roll contested by target's STR or DEX) except you always have disadvantage on you roll (no matter how the target is holding the item).

If you know the disarming attack maneuver (class feature or feat): you don't have disadvantage on your roll and your attack does damage. Use the Disarm maneuver rule (PHB p. 74) to determine success.

FLANKING

Both flanking creatures have to belong to the barbarian, fighter, paladin or ranger classes (classes that gain an extra attack at 5th level) to gain the benefit of advantage on melee attack rolls. Clerics of the War domain can also benefit from this combat tactic.

RANGED ATTACK

When attacking a target beyond normal range, you suffer a -5 penalty on your attack roll (instead of disadvantage).

SHIELD BASH

Similar to the Two-Weapon fighting rule: If you take the Attack action on your turn, you can use a bonus action to attempt a shield bash.

- Disadvantage on the attack roll
- STR modifier + Proficiency bonus (if proficient with shelds) *Hit*: 1d4 (no STR mod. bonus) (bludgeoning)

The **Shield Master feat** (PHB p. 170) lifts the disadvantage penalty and allows you to add your STR modifier to the damage.

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TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING

Use two light one-hand melee weapons. Attack with one melee weapon; use bonus action to use other weapon: disadvantage on the attack roll for second attack).

• Do not add damage mods to second attack (unless mod is negative).

• If either light melee weapon has the thrown property, you can throw the weapon instead of making a melee attack with it.

• The Dual Wielder feat allows you to use onehanded melee weapons that aren't light, and you gain AC +1; you no longer have disadvantage with the off-hand weapon.

• The Two-Weapon fighting style allows you to add your damage mod (STR or DEX) to your second attack, and you no longer have disadvantage with the off-hand weapon.

FIGHTING STYLES

The following options for the Fighting Style feature are available to the fighter, paladin and ranger classes.

HAND AND A HALF

When you wielding a melee weapon with the versatile property, no shield and no other weapon, gain a +1 to hit and +1 to damage.

From Unearthed Arcana articles:

CLOSE QUARTERS SHOOTER

You are trained in making ranged attacks at close quarters. When making a ranged attack while you are within 5 feet of a hostile creature, you do not have disadvantage on the attack roll. Your ranged attacks ignore half cover and three-quarters cover against targets within 30 feet of you. Finally, you have a +1 bonus to attack rolls on ranged attacks.

MARINER

As long as you are not wearing heavy armor or using a shield, you have a swimming speed and a climbing speed equal to your normal speed, and you gain a +1 bonus to AC. The mariner's AC bonus comes with conditions, but it plays into the restrictions a mariner must observe to gain a swimming or climbing speed. In addition, a ship-based campaign lends itself to fighters who wield scimitars (representing a cutlass) and a dagger, and who wear light armor. This specific AC bonus helps support that character option.

TUNNEL FIGHTER

You excel at defending narrow passages, doorways, and other tight spaces. As a bonus action, you can enter a defensive stance that lasts until the start of your next turn. While in your defensive stance, you can make opportunity attacks without using your reaction, and you can use your reaction to make a melee attack against a creature that moves more than 5 feet while within your reach.

NEW MANEUVERS

When a character selects a maneuver to learn from the Battle Master's list of maneuvers, they may choose one of the following:

Drop Prone. Whenever you take damage from a ranged weapon attack, you can use your reaction and expend a superiority die to drop prone as a reaction and reduce the damage of the next ranged attack against you on this turn by the number you roll on your superiority die.

Give Ground. As a reaction, whenever you take damage from a melee weapon attack or a melee spell attack (such as flame blade), you may expend a superiority die to move five feet away from that attacker in order to reduce the damage of the attack by an amount equal to the roll of your superiority die.

If none of the three squares behind you are possible destinations, you may not give ground (even if you could otherwise pass through the square, such as when occupied by an ally). Also, you may not give ground to move into difficult terrain unless you roll a successful skill check (such as using Acrobatics to leap backward onto a table.) If the move backward fails, you do not reduce the incoming damage and lose your superiority die.

You may not use this maneuver when knocked down, prone, pulled, teleported, or if you're unable to move because of a condition.