



# ADVENTURER ESSENTIALS:

## THE COMMON TONGUE

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**PATHFINDER**  
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

# **Adventurer Essentials: The Common Tongue**

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# The Common Tongue

*"I do not believe that writers are sacred. I believe that words are. They deserve respect. Put the right ones in the right order, and you can nudge the world a little, or make a poem that your children will speak for you when you are dead."*  
- Petrarch.

To convert the unbeliever, you must speak his language. To command an army, your soldiers must understand the bellowed orders of their generals. To trade, to demand surrender or to plead for mercy, to complement or to insult, to seduce, to proselytize, to scheme, to plan.... a common language must first be found.

From almost the beginning of the hobby, fantasy gamers have used such a common language to allow their characters to communicate with one another, and with their friends and enemies. The omnipresent Common is a mostly unquestioned part and parcel of fantasy gaming. If gamers think about what Common is at all, other than a quickly filled in word on a character record, they tend to imagine Common as some kind of trade language, a pidgin blending words and grammar rules from dozens of other languages.

The Common Tongue is not a hodge-podge trade language.

The Common Tongue is the first language, spoken and understood by any creature capable of thought. Every concept that ever was or ever will be is encoded in the Common Tongue, though perhaps not as elegantly as they are in later, more specific tongues. Like the Ur-language of humanity prior to the construction and collapse of the mythic Tower of Babel, the Common Tongue is a divine gift.

The language's crafter, Askarus, is one of the oldest and most influential gods, even if he is by his own choice, one of the least revered. According to the lore, in the first epoch after the creation of the Multiverse all things had their own unique language, and in the linguistic chaos communication of any sort became impossible. Askarus spent eons and sacrificed much of his divine power to create the Common Tongue, allowing all thinking beings to communicate with one another for the first time.

## Variant Rule: The Common Tongue

All creatures with an INT Score of at least 3 can speak Common, without requiring them to spend a skill rank or bonus language slot. Humans do not need to learn to speak Common, though they still require tutoring to learn to read it. A human toddler has an instinctive awareness of basic Common within a few months of birth, and a human baby's mastery of the language grows naturally over the course of his or her life. A creature's vocabulary is still determined primarily by its intelligence, so while non-humanoid brutes might easily be able to speak common, they will rarely have anything important to say.

## Common and Other Languages

The other languages- Elven and Dwarven, Infernal, Draconic and a thousand more- are ciphers evolved out of Common. The younger languages evolved as their speakers began to demand greater ideological precision and clarity from speech. The Common Tongue can do many things, but it cannot capture the beauty of angelic sonnets as perfectly as Celestial can, nor can it capture the true terrifying majesty of Infernal curses. The use of other languages became a way to hide information- to speak a code that only Dwarves would understand, for example, to as a verbal symbol of racial or ethnic pride.

The choice to use a language other than Common is an expressive choice, not necessarily a practical one. Some tongues, such as Elven and Draconic are expressions of their inventors' arrogance and smug superiority. Elven alone has hundreds of phonemes designed to elicit a psychological feeling of mild self loathing in a non-Elven speaker.

Other languages were constructed for a greater technical variety. Dwarven has nearly double the technical vocabulary of Common, including thousands of diverse technical, engineering and metallurgical terms. Many Dwarven scientific terms have been absorbed into Common. Likewise, the Gnoll language, which contains incredibly precise terms for a speaker's place in the pack order, is often borrowed by human and Elven politicians. Spellbooks (other than those of human mages) are never written in Common.

Borrowed words added to a Common-based dialect are not themselves part of Askarus' gift to the cosmos. These borrowed words are magically/instinctively understood by either the speaker or the listener, and depend on the users' familiarity with the term's original meaning.

Many human nations, and the human-like Halfling race, use Common almost exclusively. Fortunate children might attend a school to refine their instinctive mastery of the language and to become literate, but the vast majority of human children never formally learn a language. Humans are one of the very few races that bothers to incorporate new vocabulary into the Common Tongue (or, some Askarusian clerics argue, to discover new vocabulary hidden within the "Perfect Language"). Formally adding new words to Common is a task for scholars, but if a new term follows the arcane rules of linguistic metaphysics, it will be instantly understood by all creatures.

If a player character wishes to add a new term to Common, he or she must succeed at a DC 32 Linguistics check. The speaker can take 10 or 20 on this check, and most do, spending weeks and months studying the new word to make sure it fits. If this check is successful, the speaker's new terminology enters the multiversal language.

## Askarus, The Linguist

Lesser God, True Neutral

**Primary Worshipers:** scholars, translators and students

**Portfolio:** language, learning, communication, trade

**Domains:** Charm, Knowledge, Language, Rune

**Favored Weapon:** dagger

Askarus is an omnipresent and often unappreciated god, a drab and dusty god of language. Askarus lacks the ambition of the other gods and outsiders, and cares nothing for their plans and schemes. His only ambition, if you can even call it that, is to ensure that all the Multiverse's myriad of sentient creatures can communicate with one another. When the Linguist presented his divine language to the other gods and elder demons, he extracted from them a promise. So long as Askarus remains unmolested and his library home remains neutral territory, all thinking creatures may freely use the language he invented. Askarus' disinterest in attracting worshippers and his neutrality ensure his freedom to wander the infinite planes. Askarus left his place in the divine hierarchy, holding no titles and remaining uninvolved in the schemes and politics of Heaven and Hell alike.

Askarus is one of the most accessible of all the gods. His modest home is a spherical library lost somewhere in the endless white void of the Astral Plane. Visitors to the Linguist are only welcomed if they can dazzle the reclusive deity with linguistic skill (requiring a DC 40 Linguistics check). Those canny enough to earn admission to the great library may browse its incredible resources or even present the deity with a puzzle. Askarus the Linguist likes nothing better than displaying his brilliance to mortal minds, and enjoys figuring out a thorny challenge or decoding texts in a long forgotten language. Creatures as diverse as *deva* and *balors* visit the divine sage for his knowledge, and by long standing tradition, his library is peace bound. No violence or feuds can be brought to his doorstep, a tradition that even otherwise irredeemably chaotic outsiders respect.

The Linguist appears as a small, slender humanoid figure of indeterminate species and age. He wraps himself tightly in brown and grey scholar's robes, and always seems half hidden by shadows. Askarus' voice is his most instantly recognizable feature- it sounds like a chorus of dozens of voices and accents, male and female, human and alien, all speaking simultaneously.

## New Factions

Askarus' worshippers are few, but a handful of cults dedicated to his teachings exist. Askarus holds no temples of his own, though a small shrine to the god is often found in quiet corners of magical academies, colleges, temples of other gods of knowledge, magic and travel. Askarus' clergy are usually impoverished, and rarely receive the awed reverence and social privilege accorded to other clerics. They usually survive by mundane work as court translators, scribes, book binders, manuscript illuminators and tutors.

A Neutral Good faction of Askarus' worshippers are known as the Paper Hospitalers. They are a coalition of planar explorers and scholars who are most often found in the formless white chaos of the Astral Plane. Paper Hospitalers provide aid to travelers and natives of the plane without regard to race, creed or ethos. They direct seekers to Askarus' great spherical library, and offer beds for a night and supplies to stranded astral travelers. They will often help confused dimensional wanderers find a portal out of the Astral.

Paper Hospitalers are recognized by their dimensional craft, ghostly white sail vessels resembling a junk, which slice silently through the fog. Most Paper Hospitalers wear brown and crimson great coats with ornate copper buttons. Humans make up the majority of the faction, though a few of the Astral Plane's natives (such as the Icini) work with the Hospitalers.

The Common Watch is a small and dangerous human cult which also reveres Askarus. This Lawful Neutral vigilante organization's central tenant is that communication without language is a blasphemy. As such, the Common Watch ruthlessly persecutes psions, lobotomizing and executing them where ever they can be found. The Common Watch operates secretly in human lands, often without official sanction. Their calling card is a white mouth chalked to the side of a burnt out building.

The Watch is responsible for dozens of actual murders, and is blamed for hundreds more. Many human thieves guilds and assassin's brotherhoods will chalk the Watch's symbol on the wall of a crime scene, to mislead investigators. Thanks to the fear the Watch and its hateful broadsheets have stirred up against psions, often times a human town will not investigate the murder of a suspected 'mind-witch'.

## The Language Domain

**Granted Powers:** You are a student of the divine gift of communication, and understand the transformative power of words.

*Divine Comprehension (SU):* You are a natural linguist, thanks to the blessings of The Linguist. You are under the effect of a permanent *Comprehend Languages* spell, which cannot be dispelled, only temporarily suppressed. A number of times per day equal to 3+ your WIS modifier, you may touch a willing creature with an INT score of at least 3 and provide that character the benefit of a *Comprehend Languages* spell as cast by a cleric of your total class level. Touching a creature to transfer the Divine Comprehension is a standard action.

*Linguistic Immunity (SU):* Your understanding of the powerful primal language of magic allows you to ignore magical assaults that would annihilate the less educated. Starting at 8<sup>th</sup> level you become immune to all Power Word spells. In addition, a number of times per day equal to your WIS modifier, you may add a bonus equal to your number of ranks in Linguistics as a luck bonus on a saving throw against a spell or spell-like ability. You must declare the use of this ability prior to rolling the saving throw to be enhanced.

1. Speak With Animals
2. Tongues
3. Glibness
4. Legend Lore
5. Contact Other Plane
6. Geas/Quest
7. Power Word (Blind)
8. Power Word (Stun)
9. Power Word (Kill)

## New Feats

### Animal Speaker (Birthright)

You can communicate as easily with animals as you can with other men, sometimes even more easily.

**Prerequisites:** Handle Animal 1 rank, character level first only

**Benefit:** You are permanently under the effects of a *speak with animal* spell and can always attempt verbal communication with any animal. Your close connection to animal-kind provides you with a +2 insight bonus on Handle Animal and Ride checks. If you have 10 or more ranks in either skill, the bonus provided by this feat is +4 for that skill.

**Drawback:** You occasionally slip into animal speech when excited or angry, and suffer a -2 penalty on Bluff and Diplomacy checks made against other humanoids.

### Common Spell Casting (Metamagic)

You have found a secret way to encode words of magical potency into Askarus' Common phonemes, allowing your language dependant spells to affect any creature that can think. Human spell casters make excellent use of this feat.

**Prerequisite:** Linguistics 5 ranks

**Benefit:** When you cast a spell with the language-dependant descriptor, you may cast it normally even if you and the target (s) do not share a common language.

### Diplomatic Linguist (General)

You prefer to address creatures in their own languages, and reap the diplomatic and social benefits of doing so.

**Prerequisite:** Linguistics 1 rank

**Benefit:** When addressing a creature in its native language (Common in the case of most humans), you receive a +2 bonus on all CHA based skill checks. If you have 10 or more ranks in Linguistics, this bonus increases to +4.



### Rouse to Violence (General)

Your fiery words can incite the crowds to violence and can shake the foundations of nations.

**Prerequisites:** CHA 15+, Perform (oratory) 9 Ranks, Diplomacy 5 Ranks.

**Benefit:** When addressing a crowd of at least 25 sentient beings, if you succeed on a Diplomacy check to sway the crowd's attitude to helpful, they become willing to fight a common enemy at your side.

Your words stir the crowd's passions, making them surprisingly effective combatants. All those affected by the diplomacy check receive a +2 morale bonus on attack rolls made against a specific target or discrete group of targets (such as a city's noble population, the town watch, the invading members of a foreign army, ect). The effects of the words linger for a number of hours equal to your CHA modifier. This is a non-magical, mind influencing effect.

**Limitations:** Though hungry for vengeance and out for blood, the crowd will not act suicidal, quickly coming to their senses in the face of an obviously one sided fight or suicidal plan. If you are killed, surrender, or retreat from the battlefield, this feat's benefits automatically expire.

## New Spells

### Askarus' Inescapable Puzzle

**School**enchantment (compulsion) (mind-affecting)

**Level** bard 4, cleric 4

**Casting Time** one standard action **Component** V

**Range** Close (25 ft + 5 ft/level)

**Duration** up to 1 round /level

**Saving Throw** none/ see text **Spell Resistance** yes

This spell is one of the multiverse's greatest and most maddening word-riddles. When spoken, the target is held immobile as if by the *Hold Monster* spell. However, each round the target may attempt a DC 15 Linguistics check as a full round action to end the effect. The target may not take 10 or 20 on the check, but may retry a failed check each round until it either frees itself from the riddling bondage or the spell's duration expires.

### Hammer of Words

**School**evocation **Level** sorcerer/wizard 5

**Casting Time** one standard action **Component** V, S, M (shreds of a book or manuscript)

**Range** Close (25 ft + 5 ft/level)

**Duration** Ten minutes per level (D) or until discharged

**Saving Throw** WILL half **Spell Resistance** yes



This minor curse-spell is a punishment on those speaking Common in favor of another language and is often used against human troops. When the spell is cast, it creates an invisible and immobile rune on the ground or floor somewhere within the casting area, which lies dormant until triggered. When the spell is triggered by a creature speaking even one word of Common within the spell's range, the mystic rune explodes in a geyser of black fire.

All creatures within the spell's range suffer 1d6 points of force damage per caster level (maximum 10d6). The creature who spoke the offending word suffers 1d8 points of force damage per caster level (maximum 10d8) instead. The speaker also suffers a -2 penalty on the WILL Save to halve the damage inflicted.

### Language Discovery

**School** divination **Level** bard 0, cleric 0, paladin 1

**Casting Time** one standard action **Component** V

**Range** Close (25 ft + 5 ft/level)

**Duration** Instant

**Saving Throw** WILL negates **Spell Resistance** yes

This minor divinatory charm instantly reveals which languages the target can speak and read. The caster sees a colorful aura around the target, which conveys the necessary information. In lands where merely speaking Infernal and other hell-languages is considered an evil act, Inquisitor-Paladins often use this spell to ferret out heretics.

### Power Word (Peace)

**School** enchantment (compulsion) (mind-affecting)

**Level** sorcerer/wizard 6

**Casting Time** one standard action **Component** V

**Range** Close (25 ft + 5 ft/level)

**Duration** see text

**Saving Throw** none **Spell Resistance** yes

You utter a word of power that disarms hostility and prevents violence. A creature affected by this spell cannot attack or use harmful abilities for the duration of the effect, but is not helpless, may take non-harmful actions and may defend itself normally. Peace-bound creatures do not suffer any penalty to Armor Class.

The duration of the spell is determined by the target's current Hit Point total. Any creature that currently has 201 or more Hit Points is unaffected.

Hit Points	Duration
50 or less	1d6 hours
51-100	1d6+1 minutes
101-200	1d6+1 rounds

### Translator's Vigor

**School** transmutation **Level** bard 1, sorcerer/wizard 1, Language 1

**Casting Time** one standard action

**Component** V

**Range** personal

**Duration** one hour/level or until discharged

**Saving Throw** none **Spell Resistance** no

You call upon the magic inherent in language to strengthen your body. While this spell is in effect, you gain temporary hit points equal to 3 + your ranks in Linguistics (maximum +15).

### Verbal Lash

**School** necromancy (mind-affecting) **Level** bard 1, sorcerer/wizard 1

**Casting Time** one standard action **Component** V

**Range** touch

**Duration** instant

**Saving Throw** none **Spell Resistance** yes

This spell imbues you with hateful, xenophobic emotional energy. When you touch a creature, you inflict one point of damage per language spoken or understood by the target (maximum 15 points of damage) Creatures under the effect of a *Comprehend Languages*, *Tongues* spell or similar effect (such as the granted power of the Language domain) suffer maximum possible damage.

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