

BASIC D20 LOSS-BASED SPELLCASTING

Basic d20 assumes that you will use the normal D&D spellcasting system to create characters. The system detailed in this document eliminates spell slots, spell points, and other forms of Vancian spellcasting for the Basic d20 game. It is optional, but if used, spellcasters know their spells outright and can cast them at any time. The limit on spellcasting consists of a chance that the caster will lose the ability to use his highest level of spells with each casting of a spell. Once levels of spells are lost, only rest will restore the ability to use those spell levels. This system uses the Magic skill, as detailed in the previous document “Basic d20 the Magic Skill” but eliminates spell slots in favor of loss-based casting.

THE MAGIC SKILL

There is one Magic skill. Each rank in the Magic skill costs the same as one rank in a normal Basic d20 broad skill area (1 Power Point per skill rank). Purchasing ranks in the Magic skill confers certain spellcasting benefits to the character. The Magic skill represents the character’s knowledge and mastery in all forms of magic. If this broad skill area is introduced into the campaign, then the Spellcraft specialty becomes a part of the Magic skill (and is removed from the Science broad skill area).

Check: Normally associated with caster level checks only. The key ability does not figure into caster level checks. The key ability does affect the saving throw DC for spells cast by the character.

Action: Not Applicable.

Try Again: Not Applicable.

The Magic skill does not work like other skills. The Magic skill grants the character the following advantages:

Spellcaster Level: the character’s level for the purposes of spellcasting is equal to the number of skill ranks the character has in the Magic skill. Spellcaster level governs the highest level of spell the character can use and is used for all situations where a caster level is required. The character’s caster level is equal to the number of skill ranks in the Magic skill. For game effects requiring a class caster level (or some other “generic” caster level), use this caster level.

Spell Lists: Each rank in the Magic skill allows the character to access spells of the appropriate spell level based on the character’s caster level. These spells become part of the character’s personal spell list and are taken from all spell lists (bard, cleric, druid, sorcerer/wizard, etc.). If a spell has different spell levels for different classes, use the lowest from among cleric, druid, and sorcerer/wizard (excluding domain lists). For example, *true seeing* becomes a 5th level spell under this system. If a spell is not found on any of these three lists, use the lowest level listed for any class.

It is important to note that not all of these spells become automatically known by the character immediately. They must be found and learned through normal means (as determined by the GM).

Being on the character's personal spell list simply makes them available to be learned by the character, much like all sorcerer/wizard spells are available to be learned by sorcerers and wizards.

All spells up to a level equal to the number of Magic skill ranks divided by two, become part of the character's spell list (with the exception of cantrips/orisons and 1st level spells). See the chart below.

Ranks	Spell Levels in List	Ranks	Spell Levels in List
1	0th-1st	12	0th-6th
4	0th-2nd	14	0th-7th
6	0th-3rd	16	0th-8th
8	0th-4th	18	0th-9th
10	0th-5th	20	0th-10th

For example, a character with 8 ranks in Magic would include all spells from 1st to 4th level in his personal spell list. A character with 18 ranks in Magic would have every spell from 1st to 9th level in his personal spell list.

Learning Spells: Use the Magic broad skill just like Spellcraft to learn spells from a source (whether the source is a book, scroll, another character, creature, etc.). The default DC to learn a spell is 15 + the spell's level and learning a spell takes the normal eight hours as detailed in the Spellcraft skill in the SRD. However, the GM may set the DC and learning time to whatever is suitable for the campaign.

GAINING SPELLS

As stated before, just because a character has a number of spells on his personal spell list does not mean that he knows any of them. The procedure for learning spells is set by the GM, but defaults to the same method as illustrated under the Spellcraft skill description in the SRD. Furthermore, gaining one spell (of any level) costs 1 PP under this system.

If the character does not have 1 PP to spend on learning a spell, then the Natural Advancement method can be used. It takes one month to learn a spell (with an instructor) or two months to learn a spell (without an instructor). The character takes 20 on the Spellcraft roll to learn the spell in this manner. If successful (and it should be), the spell is learned and does not cost 1 PP (but it took a lot longer).

Spells can be learned from many different sources. Since magic is "generic" under this system, spells can be learned from spellbooks, from other spellcasters who know the spell, from inscriptions on buildings, a spellcaster's familiar, an otherworldly entity, the list goes on and on and is only limited by the setting and milieu.

Once learned, a spell is known in the manner of a sorcerer and can be cast spontaneously. No preparation is needed, neither prayer nor daily study. A character can cast a spell he has learned at any time. The limitation on spellcasting under this system comes in the form of "level loss" and is detailed next.

LEVEL LOSS

Casting a spell requires a lot of power, both magical power from the environment itself and personal power from the spellcaster. Every time a spellcaster casts a spell, there is a chance that that particular casting has exacted a toll on his spellcasting ability, making his most powerful magic unavailable until a period of recovery has elapsed.

Spellcasters in this system can cast whatever spells they've learned whenever they want to cast them. However, each time they cast a spell, they must make a caster level check versus level loss at a DC equal to 9 + twice the spell's level (with cantrips and orisons counting as half-level spells). If the check is successful, there are no ill effects. If the check is failed, the character loses the ability to cast the highest level of spell currently available. Regardless of whether the check is successful or not, the character receives a -1 to all further caster level checks versus level loss. This penalty does not affect other types of caster level checks (like checks against spell resistance or checks for dispel magic). Each penalty gained in this manner is cumulative (e.g., casting three spells in a row imposes a -3 penalty to the next caster level check versus level loss).

For example, a character has 8 ranks in the Magic skill. After casting a 3rd level spell, the player must make a DC 15 caster level check. He rolls a d20 and gets an '11' (failure). The highest level of spell that a character with 8 ranks in the Magic skill can cast is 4th level. Because the caster level check was failed, the character loses the ability to cast 4th level spells. A -1 penalty is applied to all caster level checks versus level loss as well (this would be true even if the save were successful).

The cumulative caster level check penalty versus level loss fades with time. Casting no spells for a full hour eliminates this penalty. GMs may prorate the elimination of this penalty for abstaining from spellcasting for less than an hour, if desired.

To regain the ability to use lost spell levels, rest is required. One hour of complete rest causes the spellcaster to regain the ability to cast the lowest level of spells lost. For example, the spellcaster above lost the ability to cast 4th level spells. Assuming he also lost the ability to cast 3rd level spells by the end of the encounter, he could rest for two hours to regain the ability to cast 3rd and 4th level spells. After the first hour of rest, he would be able to cast 3rd level spells again. After the second hour, he would once again be able to cast 4th level spells. "Rest" doesn't have to be sleep, although it can be. Rest certainly can't involve adventuring, riding, walking, casting spells, or any other activity.

It is important to note that the character's ranks in the Magic skill are in no way affected by the level loss that comes from spellcasting.

KEY ABILITY FOR THE MAGIC SKILL

The GM determines the key ability for the Magic skill in his campaign. He can vary the key ability by character, allowing the player to determine the nature and "feel" of his particular spellcaster. He could rule that the highest of the character's mental abilities (i.e., Int, Wis, and Cha) is always that character's key ability.

Regardless of the key ability chosen for each Magic skill, certain uses are standard. The key ability is added to the Difficulty Class of the saving throws for spells cast by the character. The key ability also determines the highest spell level the character can learn.

$$\text{HIGHEST SPELL LEVEL ABLE TO BE LEARNED} = \text{KEY ABILITY} \times 2 + 1$$

This yields: 1st level spells for +0, 3rd level spells for +1, 5th level spells for +2, 7th level spells for +3, and 9th level spells for +4.

ARCANE AND DIVINE SPELLCASTER DISTINCTION

Under this system, disregard the arcane/divine distinction in spellcasting. For any game effects that require the source of the character's spellcasting ability be known (whether arcane or divine), the GM should exercise good judgment. Spellcasters are not affected by the arcane spell failure chance when wearing armor in which they are proficient. Spellcasters wearing armor in which they are not proficient suffer the normal arcane spell failure chances.

LOSS-BASED CASTING: THE SIMPLEST FORM OF SPELLCASTING

This version of the Magic skill is meant to be extremely simple and self-contained. There is one Magic skill and it is just like other skills. It allows a character to learn spells (which cost power points) and cast them whenever desired. There are no spell slots, spell points, or other measure of the number of spells a character can cast in one day. Spellcasters learn their spells and do not have to prepare them or pray for them. Thus, Vancian spellcasting is eliminated.

The penalty for casting too many spells is the eventual loss of the ability to cast all spells, at least for a time. Low-level spellcasters will quickly burn themselves out if they are too eager to sling spells at problems. High-level spellcasters can continue to cast spells for longer, but they too lose their highest spell levels as a penalty for "over-casting" and must resort to using lower level spells (which are normally not up to the task of providing enough power to overcome high-level challenges). Spellcasters under this system cannot reliably cast a full slate of spells from spell slots, but must be judicious in their use of power. They can use their power, but if they abuse it, they lose it.

By using the caster level check to determine whether a character suffers from the temporary loss of spell levels, we limit the effects that can modify this check. If a Will save were used, for instance, then magical items that augment the Will save, feats like Iron Will, and other bonuses could raise a character's Will save to a very high level, almost ensuring success on the level loss check. Caster level checks are not augmented by ability score modifiers, magical items, etc. Certain cleric domains can provide a bonus to a character's caster level check and should be employed if warranted.

Being an extremely simple system, this type of spellcasting is ideally suited for a beginner's game. There is absolutely no bookkeeping when it comes to the character's spellcasting. Players understand that there's a chance that their magic will "turn itself off" if they use it too much. Deciding when to cast spells and when to save their ability to cast becomes the real challenge for players of spellcasters.