

TIPS FOR GREAT TTRPG GAMES

Player's Role

Immerse yourself in your PC and the world.

Play Your Character. Decide on your PC's actions based on their perceptions and motivations. Share brief descriptions of moves, attacks, spells, killing blows, etc. Add additional details for big moments!

Play Only Your Character: Don't suggest, remind, interrupt, or question other players (out of character) or the GM. If they make a rules mistake, ignore it if it does not directly affect your character.

Try Anything. Instead of asking "Can I ...?" describe what you are doing (if there is a chance of failure, the GM will ask for a check). If you need more info to decide a path of action, describe what you are observing or investigating to gather that info.

Play Fast. Make your turns in-character, evocative, and FAST. Decisive and quick actions are more entertaining than looking up rules or trying to squeeze every last piece of tactical advantage from a situation.

Contribute to Everyone's Enjoyment. Show up on time, know the rules (keep quick reference sheet on-hand), create a character that fits with the party and tone of the game world, keep session notes, draw maps, always pay attention so nothing has to be repeated, and be ready for your turns.

Prepare for Death: Embrace your PC's death when it happens and roll up a new PC to take their place. Losing a PC can be painful, but it makes for great stories, lets you try out new characters, and can thrust the party into unexpected situations.

Scheme: Turn every aspect of the game world to your advantage. Use psychology, magic, allies, gear, and environment to overcome obstacles. Avoid conflicts when you don't have the upper hand. Combat is not balanced for you.

Drive the Story: Make plans. Seek out adventure. Be active in deciding where to go and what to do next (but don't make simple decisions a group debate). **Pick a leader to drive action and make quick decisions.**

Seek Information: Information is your most valuable resource. Search rooms, search the fallen, learn languages, interrogate prisoners, consult sages, follow monster tracks back to their lairs, etc.

Party Roles

Assign roles to each PC.

Leader. Describe what the party, in general, is doing (individual PCs may deviate, of course). Make quick decisions, only calling for input when critical. If an individual does not agree with a decision, they can speak up. You should carry a light source.

Mapper. Keep maps of the party's explorations.

Chronicler. Chronicle all important details.

Treasurer. Keep a list of found treasure to quickly determine everyone's share after a session.

Guard. Watch for and warn the party about attacks (usually from behind). You should carry a light source.

Tactics

Hit or miss, kill or not, don't end your turn until positioned to best help your allies and yourself.

Clustering. Don't cluster with enemies (blocking allied area effects) or allies (facilitating enemy area effects).

Escape/Retreat. Maintain clear escape routes. Agree on who can call a retreat (leader, any 2 others, etc.).

Fire Lanes. Keep fire lanes open for your allies and blocked for your enemies.

Flanking. If you are resilient, move adjacent to enemies as best to help allies flank.

Focus/Spread Damage. Focus damage on one enemy at a time while attempting to get enemies to spread damage to multiple party members.

Heal. Return incapacitated allies to a fight as expediently and efficiently as possible.

Scout. Explore as much of a site as you can without putting yourself in significant danger.

Secrecy. If infiltrating a complex, make sure not to raise an alarm or allow any enemies to escape.

GM's Role

Provide players with immersive, fast, and challenging games in worlds of conflict, intriguing NPCs, fantastic locations, and grand treasures.

The PCs are the stars: Encourage players to take and describe their actions without prompting (and without you redescribing their actions). Allow their actions (or inaction) to drive the game, each session's outcome should be a surprise to everyone.

Don't Assume. Don't include PC actions or feelings in your descriptions. Vary NPC actions in response to PC actions.

Fewer Skill Checks: Allow PCs to succeed at what they're trained to do without needing to roll a check. Require checks only if there are significant negative consequences and/or there is time pressure.

A Rewarding Game: When PCs figure out clever ways to bypass or eliminate obstacles, allow them to work most often. Make treasure frequent and world and PC connected.

An Immersive Game. Make the world a living, reactive, internally consistent place. Impart extra knowledge consistent with PC ancestries, backgrounds, and classes whenever possible.

Locations to Explore: Provide locations seeded with treasures, traps, friends, foes, monsters, devices, secrets, problems without obvious solutions, and powder-keg situations ready to explode, with multiple routes to most areas.

Fleshed Out NPCs: Provide NPCs and monsters with personalities, goals, fears, loyalties and motivations, and entangled lives. They have goals, but their outcomes should not be pre-determined when the PCs can influence them.

Succinct Descriptions: Describe what the PCs see, smell, hear, etc. succinctly congruent with giving them enough information to act on.

Appears to Be. Avoid "appears to be, seems to be, sort of, etc." Instead, describe everything as if real. *Players will zero in on things that "appear to be."*

A Fast Game: Keep the pace brisk and pulse-pounding. Provide sources of conflict and opportunities for exploration, social interaction, and combat.

Determine combat initiative quickly and make order visible. Initiative tents prerolled between combats are great for this.

Don't answer hypothetical questions. Don't answer "can I?" "what would happen if?" etc. just say "you can try anything, what are you doing?" *Get players in the habit of doing things, and if they need more info, describing how they are getting the info.*

Don't allow debating actions out-of-character. Step in and move the action along if that happens. Remind the players that each round is only six seconds long.

Squash interruptions. Players must not interrupt other players' turns. Players must not interrupt GM turns unless the GM makes an obvious mistake that directly affects them.

Avoid Distractions. Ask players to put away phones, books, websites, etc.

Don't look up rules. Make rulings and go. But do look stuff up after the game to hone your knowledge.

A Challenging Game: Make the world challenging. Roll dice in the open. Make impartial and consistent rulings. Telegraph danger.

Vary Challenges. Provide a wide variety of challenges. Not everything is at the PCs' level.

TPKs happen. When a "total party kill" looks inevitable, drive full speed ahead using the enemies' best resources to achieve their goal. Their goal may not be to kill everyone. They may seek to capture, ransom, rob, drive away, take one to eat, etc. all while not risking their lives. *The players will notice if you take your foot off the gas inconsistent with enemy goals and think less of the campaign for it.*

LINKS

d20play 2024 DnD Quick Reference
dmsguild.com/product/493865

d20play Draw Steel Quick Reference
drivethrurpg.com/en/product/547334

d20play Discord
discord.gg/eKhaKnzt4N