

Foreword

A foreword from [Salvatore La Terra](#), Textbook project manager:

Whenever a potential candidate approached me and told me that he wanted to become a Magic judge, I always struggled to point him towards a suitable resource.

The Comprehensive Rules are very bulky and difficult to read for candidates. When I pointed them to a massively and overly technical document written in a foreign language, I knew I would not see them again soon, if ever.

On the other hand, when I suggested them to study on the nimble Basic Rulebook provided (and translated) by Wizards for starting players, I had them fail miserably on the written test.

I felt the program needed a document covering the middle ground between these. A document that is friendly, inviting to read and easy to grasp, but at the same time teaches aspiring judges all the rules they will need in their activity within stores.

As I could not find this document anywhere in the judge program, I did what any sane person would have *avoided at all costs*: I decided to write it. Of course, I couldn't have done such a massive deed by myself, so I asked for the help of my fellow judges: tens of extremely talented judges volunteered some work on this project. To this date, if you want to give us a hand with maintaining, expanding and translating the Textbook you can hop on [its Judge Apps page](#).

Thanks to them for all the time they've spent to bring us the **Judge Candidate Textbook**; and thanks to you, dear reader, for spending your time becoming a better Magic judge.

Introduction

The goal of this document is to teach you the rules you need to know to judge Magic tournaments with simple words and plenty of examples. We have organized the rules in an order that makes the most didactic sense, chosen the obscure corner cases to ignore, and provided examples for all the rules we explain.

Don't try to learn Magic rules just by memorizing all the examples presented in this document. This is probably the worst way you could try it (and I write "try" because you would not be successful)! Magic has over 10,000 different cards and an enormous number of possible interactions. You should try to learn the logic and concepts behind any single example presented and not concern yourself too much with the specific cards involved and the solution. A judge should be able to solve real game situations he or she has never seen before, and the only way of doing so is to learn why an example has a specific solution and asking how to apply that solution to other cases.

This book is divided in five **sections**:

- **Game basics** lays down the foundations of the game: what each part of a card means, with specific attention to color, mana cost and type, and the golden rules of the game.
- **Game structure** explains the basic mechanics in Magic: turn organization, casting spells and attacking with creatures.
- **Abilities and effects** will expand on the previous section to introduce the different kinds of abilities the cards have, and how the effects from spells and abilities interact among them and with the game.
- **The game in slow motion** will dissect the timing system of the game, that does so much with so little flair.
- **Judging tournaments** will describe how organized play works and teach you to fix a game where the players have made a mistake.

Each section is divided in **chapters**, and each chapter consists of one or more **pages**. You can use the links at the bottom of each page to move forward and backwards in the book, or to ascend the hierarchy. Alternatively, you can always jump to a section or to the global summary from the links at the top of each page.

Sometimes, we've felt the need to expand on the basic rules to deal with cases that, while difficult to grasp, are nonetheless common in tournament Magic. If you're studying for your judge test, feel free to skip all the text in **Expert** boxes. When you encounter the **Hic sunt dracones** banner, stop reading and move to the next page.

Without further ado, let's move to the summary and then to the thick of the book!

Summary

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Game basics

This section lays down the foundations of the game. The Comprehensive Rules are an extremely robust document: with thousands of cards and hundreds of mechanics, the possible situations that can arise are almost limitless, but in spite of this every possible scenario does yield exactly one result.

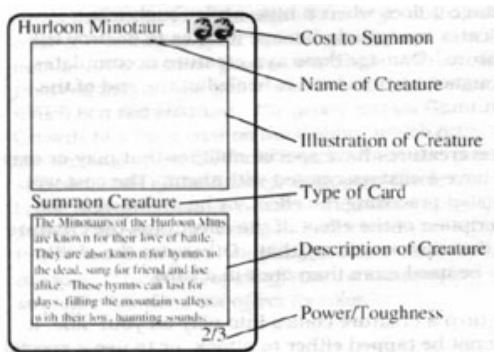


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This result is achieved mainly thanks to a meticulous definition of every term with a technical meaning. The first thing we'll do is look at the anatomy of **Magic cards** and learn the proper names of each of its parts.

We'll talk in details about the [mana cost and color of the cards](#), that are intrinsically linked. Then we'll focus on the [type line](#), that comes with some hidden rules baggage, and discuss each of the existing card types by itself.

In the end, we'll present the four [golden rules](#) that are valid across the whole rulebook.

Cards

Cards are the core of **Magic: The Gathering**. Each player needs cards to play and without those, no Magic game can take place. Let's take a closer look to a sample cards, then we discuss the most relevant values.



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- 1 Name
- 2 Mana cost
- 3 Type line
 - 3.1 Types
 - 3.2 Subtype
 - 3.3 Supertype
- 4 Power and toughness
- 5 Text box

Name

The name of each card can be found in the upper-left corner. Two cards have the same name if their name, in English, is identical.

Example. *Djinn mahâmot* and *Genio Mahamoti* are both the same card, because they have the same name in English (*Mahamoti Djinn*).



Example. The same goes for cards from different sets. Here you can see the same card (*Shivan Reef*) from M15 and 10th Edition. They are the same card printed in two different expansions.



If a card names itself in the text box, that's the way for the card to refer to itself and to *no other card* in play.

Example. If you discard a creature card, *Vampire Hounds* gets +2 power and +2 toughness. This applies to this *Vampire Hounds* you are discarding a card for, and no other one.

Let's contrast this with *Shadowborn Apostle*, that requires you to sacrifice "six creatures named *Shadowborn Apostle*", rather than "six *Shadowborn Apostles*" (which is a nonsensical template).



If an effect requires a player to name a card, then the player must name a card which actually exists and is legal in the format being played. It's not possible to name a token, unless it has the same name as a card.

Example. During a game in a Modern event, if a player plays **Pithing Needle** he must name a card legal in the Modern format. For example, he could name **Polluted Delta**, but not **Karakas**, as Karakas isn't legal in Modern.



It's also legal to name the alternate name of a flip card (for example, **Erayo's Essence**), one half of a split card (for example, **Burn**), and the back face of a double-faced card (for example, **Insectile Aberration**).

Mana cost

The symbols in the upper right corner show how much magic energy you need to spend in order to cast this spell. These symbols also dictate which color the card is. You can read about this in the [next page](#).

Type line

The type line is right under the card's illustration. The type line contains the card's type or types (yes, a card can have more than one type). Along with the type, a card could also list any number of supertypes and subtypes.

Sometimes, an effect will refer to an object by only naming it's type or subtypes. In this case, it's only referring to **permanents** of that type, i. e. cards that are on the **battlefield**. Cards on the **stack** are called **spells**, and cards in every other zone are called **cards**.

Example. **Unsummon** returns a creature to its owner's hand: since it adds no word after the card type, it's referring to a creature card on the battlefield - saying "a creature" is exactly the same thing as saying "a creature permanent". On the other hand, **Disturbing Plot** returns a creature card in a graveyard to its owner's hand.



Types

The following are the card types you can find on relevant cards:[\[1\]](#)

- Artifact
- Creature
- Enchantment
- Instant
- Land
- Planeswalker
- Sorcery

Cards of different types behave *very* differently in the game. Please refer to the [card types](#) chapter later in this section to learn about them.

Subtype

After a card type, sometimes you find a long dash and then a list of subtypes (for example: "Land — Island"). A card can have more than one subtype.

Example. *Hallowed Fountain* has the type land and the subtypes Plains and Island. In the same way, *Delver of Secrets* has the type creature and the subtypes Human and Wizard.



Subtypes are specific to each card type, except that instant and sorceries share their subtypes. If an effect tries to grant a permanent a subtype that's not appropriate for the types that permanent is, the effect fails to do so.

Example. *Gideon Jura* a creature, and *Olivia Voldaren* bites him, turning him into a Vampire. When the turn ends, Gideon stops being a creature. Since a planeswalker can't have creature types, he's not a Vampire any more.



Some subtypes come with rules baggage: [Auras](#) and [Equipments](#) are the only permanents that can be attached to another permanent, and the five [basic land types](#) give mana abilities to the lands they're printed on. You can read about this in depth in the pages dedicated to the relevant card types. All other subtypes have no rule meaning, but are handles that can be referred to by other cards.

Example. ***Goblin Roughrider** has the Goblin subtype, but this doesn't mean anything per se. However, if I control **Goblin King**, it will be able to look at the subtypes of creatures I control and grant it's bonus to those that have the Goblin subtypes.*




Supertype

Cards can also have one or more supertypes. The list of the relevant supertypes is:

- Basic
- Legendary
- Snow

Supertypes come with rule baggage, and can also be referred to by other cards:

- If a card is **basic**, you can have any number of them in your deck, regardless of the construction rules of the format you're playing.
- If a permanent is **snow**, you can use any mana it generates to pay for a  cost.
- If a permanent is **legendary**, you can only have a single copy on the battlefield at a time. If you control two or more legendary permanents with the same name, a [state-based action](#) will force you to keep one and put the rest into your graveyard.

Power and toughness

The numbers in the lower right corner of creature cards are called **power** and **toughness**, respectively. The power is the amount of damage a creature deals in combat, and the toughness is the amount of damage that's needed to destroy it. We'll talk about this in detail in the [combat phase](#) page.

Text box

The text box lists the special abilities of the permanents and the effects of spells. You can read about the different types of abilities in the [abilities](#) page.

1. ↑ There are more card types in the game, but they're either obsolete or confined to casual formats.






Colors, mana and costs

Magic revolves around casting spells; you normally do this by drawing **mana** from your lands and using it to pay costs written on the cards.

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- 1 Mana
- 2 Mana cost
- 3 Color of an object
- 4 Converted mana cost

Mana

There are five colors of mana, you may have already heard of them: white, blue, black, red, green. Each color of mana is represented by a quite recognizable symbol: , , , , . What you may not have heard is that there are *six types* of mana: white, blue, black, red, green and **colorless**. Yes, colorless is a type of mana and types are sometimes referenced on cards.

Example. While *Star Compass* can give you mana of any color that a land you control could produce, *Reflecting Pool* only gives you mana of any type that a land you control could produce. That means that, if you only have a *Star Compass* and a *Mutavault*, your *Star Compass* can produce no mana, as "colorless" is not a color. However, if you have a *Reflecting Pool* and a *Mutavault*, your *Reflecting Pool* can produce colorless mana, as "colorless" is indeed a type of mana.



Note: If an ability would produce **undefined** mana — this can happen if, in the example above, you only control *Reflecting Pools* — no mana is produced.

Mana is generated by a peculiar kind of abilities, the so-called **mana abilities**, and after being generated it is put in a "storage space": the **mana pool**. This pool empties at the end of each step and phase, so try not to keep too much mana floating in it if you don't plan to use it soon.

Example. When you tap a **Elvish Mystic**, the effect of its ability puts one green mana in your mana pool, ready to be spent or vanish spontaneously at the end of the step or phase.



Mana cost

The mana cost is the key to a card's color. Being a cost, it also carries a useful information: what mana you have to pay should you want to cast the card.

A card's mana cost is indicated by mana symbols, usually printed in the upper right corner; some cards from the Future Sight expansion have alternate frames in which the mana symbols appear to the left.

Example. **Serra Angel's** mana cost is 3***. **Tarmogoyf's** mana cost is printed on the left, in Future Sight, but is easily recognizable as 1♣. Perhaps a bit undercosted, they say...



To pay the mana cost of an object, you pay for each colored mana symbol with one mana of the correct color, and the generic mana portion with the appropriate amount of mana of any type. Note that some objects have no mana cost; this includes tokens (unless the effect that created them specifies otherwise), lands and some specific spell.

If a spell has no mana cost, you generally can't cast it like you would a normal spell, because you can't pay its cost. Spells like this may normally be cast in other ways: unplayable spells are not fun.

To play a land you don't have to pay a cost, so the absence of a mana cost is not a problem.

Example. To cast **Chandra's Outrage** you have to pay two red mana as well as two mana of any color (or even colorless). To cast **Ancestral Vision**... you should resort to a trick, as you can't cast it from your hand (Suspend may help). To play **Mutavault** you simply put it onto the battlefield during one of your main phases, when you have the priority and the stack is empty. Not having a mana cost is not a great problem, when you are a land.




If you need to pay a cost that includes one or more **hybrid mana symbols**, you choose one half of the symbol and pay mana of the appropriate color. If you choose a half with a number in it, you must pay that many mana of any type.

Example. You can cast **Tattermunge Maniac** by paying either  or . You can cast **Spectral Procession** by paying one of the following: ,  and ,  and  or .



Phyrexian mana symbols in a cost may be paid either with the appropriate color of mana or by paying 2 life. Don't mess with the Phyrexians, they hurt!


Some objects have one or more  symbols in their mana cost. You determine the value of this Xs when you cast the object, and pay mana accordingly.

Example. You can cast **Chimeric Mass** by paying one, two, five, even zero mana. The value you choose will later be referenced by the card text - in this particular case, the artifact will come into play with an amount of charge counters equal to the amount of mana you paid.



Color of an object

As we said, an object's mana cost is intrinsically linked to its *color*; an object's color is the color of the mana symbols in its mana cost.

Objects with no colored mana symbols in their mana cost are colorless; objects with two or more different colored mana symbols is each of the colors of its mana symbols. Hybrid mana symbols have both the color of their mana, while Phyrexian mana symbols have the appropriate color even if they look funnier -  is still a green mana symbol, even if it lacks branches and leaves.

Remember: ignore the *frame* a card is printed in. To find the color, look exclusively at the mana symbols.

Example. *Bident of Thassa* is a blue card — even if it is an artifact and it is printed in the corresponding frame, we look at the mana cost, see blue mana and declare the card to be extremely blue. Quite different from *Staff of the Mind Magus*, which is colorless.



Example. Both *Burning-Tree Emissary* and *Scarwood Goblins* are both red and green, even if their frames look quite different.



Some objects have a **color indicator** printed to the left of the type line. The object is each color denoted by that indicator; quite handy when an object has no mana cost but the designer still wanted it to be of a specific color without cluttering the text box with definitions.

Example. *Dryad Arbor* is green.



Remember that effects may change the color of an object, thus overriding the color as determined by looking at its mana cost. This is quite similar to effects which change the power of a creature or the type of a permanent.

Experts only! *As abilities don't have a mana cost, they don't have a color; this is not a problem, as all the cards which interacts with abilities look at the color of their source.*

Converted mana cost

The **converted mana cost** of an object is a number equal to the total amount of mana in its cost, regardless of its color.

Example. *The converted mana cost of **Essence Scatter** is two; the converted mana cost of **Scourge of Valkas** is five.*



If an object has no mana cost, its converted mana cost is zero.

Example. Remember **Ancestral Vision** and **Mutavault**? Their converted mana cost is zero. As an extension, the converted mana cost of all lands is zero, as is the converted mana cost of a token if the effect that generated it doesn't specify otherwise - it generally doesn't, but read thoroughly the card just in case.



As we said, sometimes an object has one or more \otimes symbols in its mana cost; for the purpose of determining the mana cost, each \otimes is treated as the number chosen for it if the object is on the stack, or zero otherwise.

Example. When **Mistcutter Hydra** is only a spell on the stack, if I chose to pay it one green mana and five colorless mana, its converted mana cost will be six. Once the Hydra is on the battlefield, however, its converted mana cost will be one.



What about our old friends, hybrid and phyrexian mana symbols? Quite easy: the converted mana cost of a hybrid mana symbol is the largest component of the symbol, while phyrexian mana symbols count as one.

Example. The converted mana cost of **Flame Javelin** is six (remember: the largest component - two - of each symbol), the converted mana cost of **Burning-Tree Emissary** is two, the converted mana cost of **Dismember** is three.



Sometimes a card's text will include the sentence "As an additional cost to cast this card...". Remember that these costs are *not* part of the mana cost. They are, quite intuitively, **additional costs**.

Card types

Cards, tokens, permanents, and spells can have card types, supertypes, and subtypes. We have already seen the list of card types; this chapter will devote a page to each of them.

When an object's card type changes, the new card type replaces any existing card types. Counters, effects, and damage affecting the object remain with it, even if they are meaningless to the new card type.

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Example. An animated **Opal Acrolith**'s enters combat and is dealt 2 damage. If I play an effect that gives it +3/+3 until end of turn, it will become a 5/7. If I turn it into an enchantment with its last ability, it will become an enchantment without power or toughness.

If it becomes a creature again later in the same turn, it will be a 5/7 creature with 2 damage marked on it, as the damage and the power and toughness boost silently remain on the object even as it stops being a creature.

The damage will be removed and any continuous effects will expire during the cleanup step, even if **Opal Acrolith** is not a creature at that time.



Similarly, when one or more of an object's subtypes changes, the new subtype replaces any existing subtypes from the appropriate set, while the subtypes of other sets are unaffected. (The possible sets are: creature types, land types, artifact types, enchantment types, planeswalker types, or spell types.)


Example. **Blood Moon** turns all nonbasic lands into Mountains, which means that it will remove the Forest subtype from **Dryad Arbor**. However, it will not touch its types (so it's still a land creature), and it will not touch subtypes of other sets (so it's still a Dryad).



If an object's card type is removed, the subtypes correlated with that card type will also be removed for the entire time the object's card type is removed. Removing an object's subtype doesn't affect its card types at all.

Example. If a **Dryad Arbor** is enchanted by **Song of the Dryads**, all current types (land and creature) will be replaced by the new type (land). All subtypes not relevant to the new type (Dryad) will be lost for as long as Dryad Arbor remains a non-creature land. The result will be a Land - Forest without power or toughness.



Note: Only creatures are affected by "summoning sickness", the rule that prevents creatures from attacking and using abilities with  in the activation cost if the controller hasn't controlled them continuously since the beginning of his most recent turn. This means that if I play a **Dryad Arbor** and immediately enchant it with **Song of the Dryads**, I'll be able to tap it immediately as it's not a creature any more; conversely, if I play a **Mutavault** and animate it, I won't be able to tap it for mana, as it's now a creature.

Note: Effects that change a permanent's type have special rules. You can read more about these effects on the [type-changing effects](#) page.

If an instruction requires a player to choose a subtype, that player must choose one, and only one, existing subtype for the appropriate card type.

Example. **Engineered Plague** requires you to choose a creature type when it enters the battlefield. It will be only possible to choose an existing subtype of the creature type, such as Goblin. Arcane is not a legal choice, as it is a spell subtype, used only for instant and sorcery cards. It is also not possible to choose an arbitrary word not listed as an existing creature type.

If **Nature's Revolt** is on the battlefield all **Forests** will be Creature Land - Forest. Despite this it's still not possible to choose Forest for **Engineered Plague**, as Forest is a land subtype, even if it appears on creature permanents.



A card that is both a land and another card type (for example, an artifact land) can only be played as a land. It can't be cast as a spell.

Lands

Lands will provide you with one of the most basic resources in the game - mana. Without mana, you cannot pay for any of your spells, so having lands in your deck is almost always necessary in order to play the game. Once you play a land, it becomes a permanent, and it remains on the battlefield to be used once per turn.

In order to get mana, you will **tap** your lands, which means to turn them sideways. Typically, tapping a land will add one mana to your mana pool, unless the land card specifies otherwise. Once the land is tapped, it cannot be used again until you **untap** it, usually at the beginning of your next turn.

Some cards have the basic supertype. These are known as **basic lands**. All other lands are **non-basic lands**.

Basic lands

Basic lands will always have the word "basic" printed on the type line of the card. They will also have exactly one of the **basic land types**: Plains, Island, Swamp, Mountain, and Forest (or none, in the case of **Wastes**).

Basic land types have special rules: they automatically give the card they're printed on the mana ability of the appropriate kind, although that ability is typically not printed out.



- Plains have "☞: Add ⬢."
- Islands have "☞: Add ⬢."
- Swamps have "☞: Add ⬢."
- Mountains have "☞: Add ⬢."
- Forests have "☞: Add ⬢."

When building your deck, there is no limit to the number of basic lands you may include.

Changing the type of a land to a basic land type will remove all abilities from that land, and grant it the appropriate mana ability for the new land type. See [type-changing effects](#) for more information about this.

Non-basic lands

Any land that does not have the basic supertype printed on it is a non-basic land. These lands can still have a basic land type, but this does *not* make them basic lands.

Example. *Hallowed Fountain* doesn't have the basic supertype, which means it's a non-basic land: you can only have four in your constructed deck, it's affected by **Blood Moon** and so on. However, it does have two basic land types: it's both a Plains and an Island. Because of this, you can tap it for either  or , you can fetch it with **Polluted Delta** or **Windswept Heath**, and is counted by **Armored Ascension** and **Flow of Ideas**.



Non-basic lands do not tap for mana unless the text in their text box specifies that they do, or unless they have a basic land type. They may also have other abilities besides [mana abilities](#).

Playing lands

Playing lands is a [special action](#) and cannot be responded to. There are further restrictions on playing lands:

- Normally, you may only play one land per turn. However, continuous effects may increase this number. If an ability allows you to play more than one land per turn, compare the total number of lands you are allowed to play with the total you have already played to determine if you have fulfilled all your land drops for that turn.
- You may only play a land during a main phase of your own turn, while the stack is empty. If you are somehow able to play lands at a different time, ^[1] you may be able to play them during other phases of your turn or while the stack is not empty, but you will **NOT** be allowed to play them during another player's turn.

If an object is both a land and another card type, it can only be played as a land. It cannot be cast as a spell. Lands can never be cast. If a spell or ability allows you to *cast* a card, you may not *play* a land card using that ability.

Example. *Nightveil Specter* and *Daxos of Meletis* look like they have the same ability, but if we look closer, we'll see that the Specter allows us to play the exiled card (which means we can play it if it's a land card or cast it if it's a non-land card), whereas Daxos instructs us to cast the exiled card, which means that we can only use it to steal spells, not lands.



Spells and abilities that instruct you to "put a land onto the battlefield" do not count towards your total number of land drops per turn, and do not follow the restrictions on "playing" a land.

- i. ↑ For example with a combination of **Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir** and **Dryad Arbor**, or thanks to **Djinn of Wishes**

Creatures

If you're going into battle, you'll need to summon an army, right? Creatures are the permanents who will fight for you and defend your life total.

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Summoning creatures

You may cast a creature card during one of your main phases, when the stack is empty, unless it has **flash**. You may cast creature cards with flash any time you have priority.



They actually
used to spell it
on creatures.

When a creature enters the battlefield, it will have what is commonly and informally known as **summoning sickness**. A creature affected by summoning sickness can't attack, and its abilities with a  symbol in their cost can't be activated. A creature recovers from summoning sickness if you have controlled it since the beginning of your last turn.

Some creatures have **haste**, which means they are unaffected by summoning sickness. Hasty creatures can attack and use its activated abilities no matter how long you have controlled it.

Power and toughness

Creatures are the only type of permanent that have a power and a toughness. The **power** represents the amount of damage that creature will deal in combat; the **toughness** represents the amount of damage needed to destroy it. Effects that affect a creature's power and toughness are very common in **Magic**, and [special rules](#) apply to them.

Creature types

Creatures also have subtypes. Most creatures have two subtypes - the first is a race, the second is a class. You will always see the word "creature" on the type line, followed by a long dash, then the creature's subtypes. For example: Creature — Goblin Soldier. Creature subtypes are also referred to as "creature types". A creature can have multiple creature types.

Damaging creatures

Creatures are the only type of permanent that can attack and block during the combat phase. They're also one of the two types of permanents that can be dealt damage, the other being [planeswalkers](#).

When a creature is dealt damage, either through combat or through the effect of a spell or ability, that damage is said to become **marked** on the creature. That damage will remain marked on the creature until the next cleanup step, or until the creature leaves the battlefield or [regenerates](#).

Whenever the total damage marked on a creature is greater than or equal to its toughness, the creature has taken **lethal damage**. If a creature has taken lethal damage, it is destroyed by [state-based actions](#), unless it regenerates or it has the indestructible ability.

Instants and sorceries

Instants and sorceries are single-use spells, and are the only cards that go to the graveyard after resolving. They can never be put onto the battlefield.

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- 1 Spell Abilities
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Spell Abilities

Spell abilities are the simplest type of ability in the game. Spell abilities are simply the instructions that are followed while an instant or sorcery spell is resolving. Most instants and sorceries only have spell abilities, but they can have [static](#), [triggered](#) and [activated abilities](#).

Example. Some instants and sorceries, like **Lightning Storm** or **Clear** have activated abilities. Others, like **Dash Hopes** or **Mind's Desire**, have triggered abilities. Some, such as **Counterflux** or **Kaervek's Torch**, have static abilities.



Instants and sorceries cannot have [mana abilities](#).

Example. Instants and sorceries that add mana to a player's mana pool do so with spell abilities. **Dark Ritual** and **Deconstruct** are both examples of this.



Split cards

Some instant and sorcery cards are **split cards**, which means there are two separate cards printed onto one. Everywhere except the stack, the characteristics of a split card are those of its two halves combined. This is a change from previous rules. When casting a split card, a player must choose one side to cast.

Example. A player may chose to cast either **Fire** or **Ice**.

*All of the split cards from Dragon's Maze (such as **Turn // Burn**) have the fuse ability, which allows its owner to cast both sides of the card as one spell, but only if he's casting it from his hand.*



Instants

Instants are spells that are unique in their ability to be cast any time a player has priority. Non-instant spells may only be cast during a player's main phase when the stack is empty. Instants are therefore often reactionary spells, like those that can counter or redirect another spell on the stack, or combat tricks, intended to be cast during the **combat phase**.

Interrupts and mana sources

Interrupts and mana sources were old card types, now obsoleted. All cards that were of the interrupt or mana source type are now instants.

Example. Look at the pictures in this example to see specimens of cards with the obsolete types.



Sorceries

Some abilities state they can be activated "only any time you could cast a sorcery". It is absolutely irrelevant if you actually have a sorcery card you can cast, or are allowed to cast sorceries at all. This template is only a shorthand to say: "Activate this ability only during your main phase, whn your stack is empty."

Enchantments

Enchantments are spells that affect the battlefield or some portion of it. Enchantment spells can only be cast in your main phase, when the stack is empty and enter the battlefield as they resolve.

Enchantments can have subtypes. One of these subtypes, Aura, has a specific rule meaning and must be discussed in detail.

Auras

Auras are usually enchantments that bolster one of my creatures or debilitate one of my opponent's. In general, an Aura must always be attached to another object, that is referred to as **the enchanted <type>** by the Auras abilities. All Auras have an **enchant** ability that describes which kind of object that Aura can be attached to.

Example. As I cast **Dragon Mantle**, I target a creature, and the Aura will enter the battlefield attached to it. Then, each time its ability will resolve, it will check which creature it's attached to and grant it +1 power.



Auras have the peculiarity of being the only permanent spells that require a target. The target is defined by their enchant keyword. This means that Aura spells are the only permanent spells that can **fizzle**.

Example. As I cast **Divine Favor**, I need to specify a target. If the target is removed in response to my enchantment spell, Divine Favor won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack. It won't enter the battlefield and then be put into the graveyard, and I won't gain life.



If at any time an Aura is attached to something that doesn't match its enchant ability, or is not attached to anything, it's put into its owner's graveyard by **state-based actions**.

Example. If **Mutavault** is a creature, it can be targeted by an Aura spell with enchant creature, such as **Flight**. When Mutavault stops being a creature at the end of turn, the Aura's restriction on "enchant creature" will no longer be satisfied, so the Aura will be put into the graveyard.



An Aura can be controlled by a different player than the controller of the permanent it enchants.

Example. If a creature enchanted with **Ordeal of Purphoros** has with two +1/+1 counters on it and is stolen with **Portent of Betrayal** and attacks, the Ordeal will add a third counter on it and be sacrificed. However, the triggered ability will be controlled by the controller of the Ordeal, not by the controller of the enchanted creature.



Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



If an Aura is entering the battlefield without being cast (and wasn't put onto the battlefield by an effect that specifies what it will be attached to), then its controller will choose a permanent that meets the enchant ability's restrictions and the Aura will enter the battlefield attached to it. Note that this allows Auras to become attached to permanents that couldn't be targeted, but not to permanent that couldn't be enchanted by it.

Example. My **Control Magic** is entering the battlefield without being cast, courtesy of **Academy Rector**. I can choose to have it enter attached to **Geist of Saint Traft**, as I'm not targeting it. However, I can't attached it to my opponent's **Progenitus**, a protection doesn't only mean that it can't be targeted, it also specify that it can't be enchanted.



If an Aura is trying to enter the battlefield this way but its controller is unable to pick an object to enchant, or it's supposed to enter the battlefield attached to something it can't enchant, it stays in the zone it currently is and doesn't move at all.

Example. I have a creature on the battlefield and several Auras in my graveyard, including a **Daybreak Coronet** in play. If I cast **Retether**, all Auras will try to move from the graveyard to the battlefield at the same time, and I need to pick a legal object to enchant for each of them. Since at this time my creature is not enchanted, it's not legal for **Daybreak Coronet** to be attached to it, so **Daybreak Coronet** stays in my graveyard and doesn't move.



Example. I can cast **Aura Finesse** targeting **Nylea's Presence** and **Nylea's Disciple**. However, as **Nylea's Presence** can't be attached to a creature, **Aura Finesse** will fail to move it.



Artifacts

Artifacts are a type of permanent. They have no characteristics specific to their card type. Most have no colored mana in their mana cost, and are thus colorless permanents. However, there is not a strict relationship between artifacts and colorlessness: artifacts can be colored, and other types of permanents can be colorless.

Example. *Executioner's Capsule*, though it is black, has "Artifact" in its type line. It is an artifact.

Ulamog's Crusher, though it is colorless, does not have "Artifact" in its type line. It is not an artifact.



A player may cast an artifact during his or her main phase when the stack is empty and he or she has priority. When the artifact spell resolves, its controller puts it onto the battlefield under his or her control.

Artifacts may have one or more subtypes. They are listed as single words after a long dash (e.g., "Artifact — Equipment").

Equipment

Equipment are a type of artifact that deserve a more in-depth examination. They are identified by the subtype "Equipment." They can be attached to a creature; an Equipment that is attached this way is said to "equip" the creature, and the creature is the "equipped creature."

Equipment can't be legally attached to an object that's not a creature. When an Equipment enters the battlefield, it does not immediately equip any creature unless an effect specifically says otherwise.

The normal method of equipping a creature is via the equip keyword ability. . Activating an equip ability attaches the Equipment to a target creature you control. The controller of the creature and the equipment must be the same to activate the equip ability; similarly, the controller must be the same when the equip ability resolves (otherwise the Equipment doesn't move). Other abilities may also attach an Equipment to a creature.

Example. I activate the equip ability of my **Bonesplitter** targeting my **Runeclaw Bear**. In response, my opponent casts **Act of Aggression**, targeting the **Runeclaw Bear**. My opponent gains control of the **Runeclaw Bear**. When the equip ability resolves, the **Runeclaw Bear** is no longer a legal target, so the ability doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack. The **Bonesplitter** stays where it was.



Once an Equipment is attached to a creature, the controller of each need not be the same. Gaining control of an Equipment doesn't give control of the equipped creature, nor does gaining control of an equipped creature give control of the attached Equipment.

Example. I control a **Runeclaw Bear** equipped by **Cranial Plating**. My opponent casts **Zealous Conscripts**, and it resolves. If he targets the **Runeclaw Bear** with the Conscripts' triggered ability, he'll gain control of the **Runeclaw Bear**, but not the **Cranial Plating**. Although my opponent controls the **Runeclaw Bear**, I may activate either of **Cranial Plating**'s activated abilities to equip one of my own creatures (though timing restrictions still apply - I can't activate the equip ability on my opponent's turn).

Conversely, if my opponent targets the **Cranial Plating** with the Conscripts' triggered ability, he gains control of the Equipment, but I still control the **Runeclaw Bear**. He can activate either of **Cranial Plating**'s activated abilities to attach it to a target creature he controls.



If an Equipment is equipping an illegal or nonexistent permanent, it becomes unattached as a state-based action. It remains on the battlefield. The most common cause of this is the equipped creature leaving the battlefield, but protection or type-changing effects can cause a permanent to be unable to be equipped.

Example. I animate **Inkmoth Nexus** and equip it with **Cranial Plating**. I attack with it, and pass the turn. During the cleanup step Inkmoth Nexus's type-changing effect ends, and the Cranial Plating falls off.



Example. My **Runeclaw Bear** is equipped with a **Bonesplitter**. I target it with **Apostle's Blessing** and choose to give it protection from artifacts until end of turn. The Bonesplitter falls off as a state-based action.



If an Equipment becomes a creature (for example, thanks to **March of the Machines** or **Tezzeret, Agent of Bolas**), it can't equip anything - including itself - and immediately falls off.

Planeswalkers

The planeswalker card type was introduced in the game with the ***Lorwyn*** set, along with some rule changes about damage dealt with spells and during the combat phase. This card type comes with two implicit [replacement effects](#). It's important to remember that these are normal replacement effects, and [interact](#) normally with other effects of this type.

Planeswalker spells can be cast any time a player can cast a sorcery. If they resolve, they enter the battlefield with the number of loyal counters indicated in the lower right corner (this is the first implicit replacement effect).

Loyalty is a characteristic only planeswalkers have. A planeswalker on the battlefield has loyalty equal to the number of loyalty counters on it; a planeswalker card in any other zone has a loyalty equal to the value printed in the corner. The loyalty of a planeswalker can change in several ways: activating the abilities of the planeswalkers, dealing damage to them or manipulating the counters as counters themselves.

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- [1 Loyalty abilities](#)
- [2 Fighting planeswalkers](#)
- [3 Counter wars](#)
- [4 Emblems](#)

Loyalty abilities

The "natural" way to modify the loyalty counters on a planeswalker is by activating the planeswalker's *loyalty abilities*. Each planeswalker has a number of these, that are activated abilities with loyalty symbols in their costs.

Loyalty abilities follow special rules: a player may activate a loyalty ability of a permanent he or she controls only at a time he or she can cast a sorcery, but only if none of that permanent's loyalty abilities have been activated that turn.

The cost to activate a loyalty ability of a permanent is to put on or remove from that permanent a certain number of loyalty counters, as shown by the loyalty symbol in the ability's cost.

Example. If I cast **Jace, the Mind Sculptor**, it will enter the battlefield with 3 loyalty counters. Since I receive priority after a spell resolves, I can immediately activate one of the first three abilities, by paying the cost of adding or removing the amount of loyalty counters indicated near the ability.

This means that if I activate the first ability Jace's loyalty will become 5; if I decide to use the third ability, Jace's loyalty will become 2.



Fighting planeswalkers

Another way to modify the loyalty counters on a planeswalker is by dealing damage to it. Damage dealt to a planeswalker results in that many loyalty counters being removed from it. Just like players, planeswalker can be beaten up by creatures or burned by bolts.

Planeswalkers can be attacked. When a player has to declare attacking creatures and the defending player controls at least a planeswalker, the attacking player has to declare if each creature is attacking the opponent or one of the planeswalkers he or she controls.

If a creature attacking a planeswalker is not blocked, it will deal combat damage to the planeswalker during the **combat damage step**, which as we said results in the same amount of loyalty counters being removed from the 'walker.

Example. If I attack **Chandra, Pyromaster**, which has 4 loyalty counters, with an **Ash Zealot** and my opponent doesn't block, Chandra will have 2 loyalty counters after damage is dealt.



Planeswalkers can also receive non-combat damage. Players can target planeswalkers directly with spells that deal damage to a planeswalker or any target.

Example. I cast **Lightning Bolt** targeting my opponent's **Liliana Vess** with 5 loyalty counters. As the **Lightning Bolt** resolves, the damage dealt by **Lightning Bolt** to **Liliana Vess** will cause 3 loyal counters to be removed from her.



Counter wars

The last way to interact with the loyalty of a planeswalker is to use an effect that manipulates counters. For example, *proliferate* will work on loyalty counters and the ability of **Vampire Hexmage** will reduce to 0 the loyalty of a planeswalker.

If a planeswalker's loyalty is 0, it's put into its owner's graveyard as a **state-based action**.

Example. If I control **Vampire Hexmage** and my opponent controls **Nicol Bolas, Planeswalker**, I can activate the **Vampire Hexmage's** ability to remove all the loyalty counters from **Nicol Bolas, Planeswalker**, basically killing him.



One more thing to know about planeswalkers is that they have a subtype, and are always legendary, so they follow the "legend rule". Planeswalker subtypes are always a single word and are listed after a long dash: "Planeswalker — Jace". Planeswalker subtypes don't have any mechanical implication, but other cards can look for specific planeswalker types.

Example. I control **Jace, Architect of Thought**, and activate his second ability, without reducing Jace's loyalty to 0. After the ability resolves, I cast **Jace, Memory Adept**. Even though both permanents represent the same story character, they have different names, so the legend rule doesn't kick in.

On the other hand, if I cast another Jace, Architect of Thought, I will control two planeswalkers with the same name, so I will have to choose one of them and put the other in my graveyard. If I keep the fresh one, I can activate one of his loyalty abilities this turn, as it's a different permanent from the Jace, Architect of Thought that I used earlier.

Jace's Sentinel receives a bonus if I control "a Jace planeswalker". This means that I need to have a planeswalker with the Jace subtype.



Emblems

Some planeswalkers have abilities that have a lingering effect on the game. The way they do this is by creating an *emblem* in the **command zone**. Even though we can think of emblems as "enchantment spells cast by my planeswalker", emblems are not cards and above all are *not* permanents. They can't be destroyed or interacted with, and have no characteristic at all, except for the abilities defined by the effect that created it.

Golden rules

Like any games, Magic has its own rules, but some rules are more important than others. These rules form the foundations of the **Magic** rules, and are very important to grasp.

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- 1 Cards win against rules
- 2 "Can't" wins against "can"
- 3 Impossible is ignored
- 4 Active player first, then non-active player

Cards win against rules

Whenever a card's text directly contradicts the rules, the card takes precedence. The card overrides only the rule that applies to that specific situation. The only exception is that a player can concede the game at any time.

Example. ***Sphinx of Jwar Isle** has an ability that states you may look at the top card of your library, even if the rules state that the library is a hidden zone where all cards must be kept face down and none can see it..*



Example. *After the opponent cast a **Thoughtseize**, a player realizes that by letting the spell resolve completely he'll have to reveal important information that the opponent could use in following games. If the current game is already going to be lost, he can concede the game and stop the resolution of the spell.*



"Can't" wins against "can"

When a rule or effect says something can happen and another effect says it can't, the "can't" effect wins.

Example. If **Exploration** is on the battlefield under your control, and you opponent casts **Turf Wound** on you, you can't play any lands.



Adding abilities to objects and removing abilities from objects don't fall under this rule. For this category of effects, the last effect to resolve trumps the other.

Example. If a creature is targeted by **Jump**, and **Jump** resolves, and then is targeted by a **Adarkar Windform's** ability, and it resolves, the creature does not have flying.

On the other hand, if **Adarkar Windform's** ability resolves and after that **Jump** resolves, the creature does have flying.



Impossible is ignored

If an instruction requires a player to take an impossible action, this instruction is ignored. Sometimes, the card will specify consequences for this; if it doesn't, there's simply no effect.

Example. ***Smallpox** instructs both players to sacrifice a land, sacrifice a creature and discard a card. If a player controls no creature, that instruction is impossible for him, so it will be ignored: the player will simply sacrifice a land and discard a card. Since there are no specific consequences written on the card for not sacrificing the creature, nothing will happen if a player doesn't control any.*

*On the other hand, if a **Lord of the Pit** instructs me to sacrifice another creature, but I don't control one, that part of the effect is ignored, but a consequence is specified: the mighty Demon will smack me for 7 damage.*



Active player first, then non-active player

Sometimes, multiple players need to make a choice or take an action at the same time. In this case, the active player (the player whose turn it is) make his choices or picks his action, then the other player will do the same.

[1] Then the actions happen simultaneously. This rule is often referred to as the "**active player, non-active player order**" rule, or APNAP for shorts.

If an effect has each player choose a card in a hidden zone, such as his or her hand or library, those cards remain face down as they're chosen. However, each player must clearly indicate which face-down card he or she is choosing.

Example. ***Liliana of the Veil**'s first ability forces both players to discard a card. Because discarding a card involves choosing a card from the hand (a hidden zone), the active player will choose the card first and put it aside face down, in such a way that it is clearly identifiable. Then the non-active player will do the same. Then both players will simultaneously put the chosen cards in their graveyards.*



On the other hand, if the choice involves objects in a public zone, the non-active player will make his choice after seeing what the active player chose.

Example. ***Barter in Blood** forces both players to sacrifice two creature. If both players control creatures, the active player will choose the creatures to sacrifice first, then the non-active player (knowing the choice of the other player) will choose his creatures. When all players have made their choices, all the chosen creatures will be sacrificed simultaneously.*



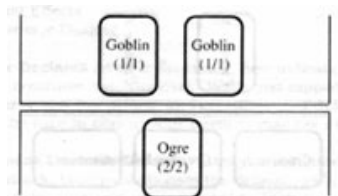
1. ↑ If there are more than two players in the game, the active player chooses first, then the players make choices in turn order.

Game structure

This section builds on the foundations laid in the [previous section](#), showing what **Magic** ultimately is about: casting spells and attacking with creatures. After reading this section, you'll probably be able to swiftly play a game of *Portal* - a **Magic** redux that was supposed to introduce new players to Dominaria using a little more than sorceries and vanilla creatures, which is obviously a recipe for boring game play.^[1]

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1. [Game zones](#)
2. [Phases and steps](#)
3. [On the stack](#)



Life was simpler back then.

We'll start with a description of the [game zones](#), the areas with flavorful names where we place our cards. Then we'll discuss how a turn is articulated in [phases and steps](#), and what can and can't be done in each of them; this will include a dissection of the [combat phase](#), probably the more strategically sound in modern **Magic**.^[2]

We'll then focus on the other pillar of the game: [playing](#), [countering](#), [resolving](#) and otherwise messing with spells and abilities.

1. ↑ No surprise it was discontinued. [What were they thinking?](#)
2. ↑ You may have heard players lamenting the [power creep](#) introduced by Wizards to achieve this result. Don't listen! You'll notice it's usually old-style players that hail from the time when it was considered socially acceptable, if not actually *cool*, to actively [prevent your opponent from playing](#), and spend long posts lamenting [the death of blue](#). But I definitely digress.

Game zones

Zones are virtual areas which all objects in any **Magic** game belong to. Objects can change zones through game rules, their own rules, spells, costs or abilities. The zones are, in no particular order: the library, the hand, the stack, the battlefield, the graveyard, the exile zone and the command zone (older magic players may know of the ante zone, but it is functionally obsolete). Zones can be accessible to a limited number of players, or no players (examples being the library and the hand - known as hidden zones), or can be accessible to all players (every zone but the library and hand - called public zones).

Libraries, graveyards and hands are separate for each player, whilst all other zones are shared. , The order of objects in the library, graveyard or stack can't be changed, unless something dictates otherwise. Cards outside the game do not have a zone, nor is the sidebar a zone (cards in a sidebar are outside the game).

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Library

At the beginning of every **Magic** game, your deck is shuffled (usually by you, but sometimes by your opponent as well), and then it becomes your library. From here you determine play order and perform mulligans. The library is hidden to all players and its order is static unless an effect would dictate otherwise. The number of cards in a library is information available to all players.

Draw

Drawing a card is putting the top card of your library into your hand. Generally, you do this at the beginning of your [draw step](#), or whenever a spell or ability instructs you to ([Divination](#) and [Howling Mine](#) are both examples of these types of abilities). *Drawing* is a specific action, so have in mind that moving cards from the top of your library to your hand is *not* drawing.

Example. Both *Jace, Architect of Thought*'s second ability and *Jace, Memory Adept*'s first ability cause cards to move from your library to your hand. However, since only *Memory Adept* uses the keyword action "draw", it's the only one that causes *Horizon Chimera*'s ability to trigger.



Shuffle

To shuffle is to re-randomize a zone or pile of cards (almost always the library), so that no player knows the order of the cards. Spells or abilities may cause this to happen (for example *Diabolic Tutor*). This also occurs at the beginning of the game.

Hand

The hand is a zone where cards go when drawn or put there by an effect, and is unique to each player. Any player may determine the number of cards in another player's hand, but may only view their own hand, unless a spell or ability allows them to do otherwise, for example *Duress*. Players may change the order of cards in their hand.

Discard

Discard is a keyword action. To discard is to move a card from a player's hand to their graveyard. This defaults to being done by the player who is discarding, but some effects may specify otherwise (*Hymn to Tourach* and *Duress* both change who chooses the card to be discarded).

Battlefield

Generally, the space between two players is the battlefield. Cards on the battlefield are permanents, and permanents exist only on the battlefield. Permanents controlled by a player are usually closest to that player.

Note: The battlefield used to be called "the in-play zone" until *Magic 2010*. This name was never used on cards as such, but permanents used to "come into play" and "leave play", which caused a bit of confusion as spells were "played" rather than "cast". In order to remove some of the ambiguity around the word "play", this zone was renamed, and countless cards reworded.

Destroy

Destroy is a keyword action. Destruction occurs when a spell or ability explicitly uses the word "destroy", or when *state-based actions* kill a creature with lethal damage, and it means to move the destroyed permanent to

the graveyard. Anything else that goes to the graveyard by any other means has not been destroyed. .
Regeneration can save creatures that are destroyed, but not ones otherwise put into the graveyard.

Example. ***Doom Blade** and **Planar Cleansing** use the keyword "destroy", so a **Mending Touch** can be used to save a creature from one of those. On the other hand, if a creature dies because **Bile Blight** lowers its toughness to 0 or because of the "legend rule", **Mending Touch** can't save it.*



Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a keyword action. To sacrifice a permanent, it's controller moves it from the battlefield to the graveyard. Only the controller of a permanent can sacrifice that permanent. Cards that sacrifice include **Blood Bairn** and the Away side of **Far // Away**.

Example. *My opponent copies his **Sundering Titan** with **Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker** and attacks me with the token, but I take control of it with my **Vedalken Shackles**. At the end of turn, the delayed triggered ability generated by Kiki-Jiki, **Mirror Breaker** instructs my opponent to sacrifice the token, but since he doesn't control it at that time, he can't. The token stays on the battlefield.*



Dies

A permanent *dies* when it moves from the battlefield to the graveyard. This verb is only used for creatures, and we say that a creature dies regardless of the way it ends up in the graveyard.

Example. *Kokusho, the Evening Star* has an ability that triggers when it dies. This ability will go off if Kokusho dies in combat, is destroyed by **Terminate**, is targeted by **Dismember**, is sacrificed to **Liliana of the Veil**'s second ability, is placed in the graveyard because of the "legend rule".



Graveyard

The graveyard is where all discarded, destroyed, countered and sacrificed objects go (and where most resolved spells also end up). Cards can be put there directly by a spell, ability or game rule. The graveyard's order can't be changed, as some cards care about it ; however, tournament rules allow players to disregard this rule in formats where no such cards are legal - that is formats that only include cards from *Urza's Saga* onwards. All graveyards begin the game empty.

Stack

The stack is where **triggered abilities**, **activated abilities** and **cast spells** go. They remain there until they are **countered**, they **resolve** or they are moved elsewhere by a spell, ability or game rule. The following things do *not* go on the stack:

- **Static abilities** don't go on the stack. For example, take **Archetype of Imagination**: this ability doesn't "trigger", one does not "activate" it, it's just *true*.
- **Mana abilities** don't use the stack. For example, **Nykthos, Shrine to Nyx** has two mana abilities: if I activate the second one, you can't kill one of my creatures "in response" to lower my devotion and have me get less mana.
- **Special actions** don't use the stack. The best example of a special action is playing a land: once you see my **Starlit Sanctum**, you can't kill my Cleric "in response".
- **Turn-based actions** don't use the stack. The best example of a turn based action is drawing a card in your draw step.
- **State-based actions** don't use the stack.
- Conceding doesn't use the stack.

The stack and pancakes

You can think of the stack like a pile of pancakes:



The stack	Pancakes
The stack is last on, first off	Pancakes can only be put on the top of the pile, and you eat pancakes from the top.
The controller of a spell is the player who cast it, the controller of an ability is the controller of it's source	Your pancake is the one that was given to you, made by you or bought by you.
All characteristics of the object on the stack are either defined by the spell you cast, or the object that created it	A pancake's flavor is chosen by the thing that made it.
If the stack is empty, the turn or phase ends	If there are no more pancakes, the meal ends.

If two or more triggered abilities are waiting to go on the stack, the active player (the player whose turn it is) puts all his abilities on the stack in any order, then the other player puts his objects on the stack in any order.

Example. I control a **Murderous Redcap**, and my opponent controls a **Kitchen Finks**. Both creatures have no counters on them. I cast **Volcanic Fallout**, so both creatures die and persist back onto the battlefield. Can I kill the Kitchen Finks with damage from Murderous Redcap?

It depends from whose turn it is! Is it's my turn, persist from Murderous Redcap will go on the stack first, followed by Kitchen Finks'. Kitchen Finks will come back, my opponent will gain 2 life, then Murderous Redcap will come back and I'll be able to target Kitchen Finks with its ability. If it's my opponent's turn, persist from Kitchen Finks will go on the stack first, followed by Murderous Redcap's. Murderous Redcap will come back first, it will deal damage to something - but not to Kitchen Finks, since it's still in the graveyard at this time - then Kithen Finks will come back.

The image shows two Magic: The Gathering cards side-by-side. On the left is 'Murderous Redcap', a red Goblin Assassin creature with a power/toughness of 2/2. Its ability states that when it enters the battlefield, it deals damage equal to its power to a target creature or player. It also has a 'Persist' ability that returns it to the battlefield with a -1/-1 counter if it dies without one. On the right is 'Kitchen Finks', a green Ouphe creature with a power/toughness of 3/2. Its ability states that when it enters the battlefield, the controller gains 2 life. It also has a 'Persist' ability that returns it to the battlefield with a -1/-1 counter if it dies without one, and an 'Accept' ability that allows the controller to accept one favor from an Ouphe.

If each player has passed priority in succession, (that is, taken no actions one after another), the top item of the stack resolves. This will be discussed in greater detail when we talk about **priority**).

Example. I cast **Divination**, and my opponent casts **Dissolve** in response. Neither of us wants to add anything else on the stack, so the top object resolves: Dissolve counters Divination. I pass priority again without acting, and so does my opponent: the current phase ends.



Exile

The exile zone is a shared zone, where objects are held. There are two main uses for this zone:

- some kill spells (such as **Path to Exile** and **Swords to Plowshares**) use it to kill a creature and make sure *it stays dead*, rather than being **Disentombed**
- some effects (such as the ones from **Restoration Angel**, **Banishing Light** and **Astral Slide**) use the exile to "temporary park" some objects outside of the battlefield, where they will return at a later time

Order of this zone does not matter, and players are encouraged to keep cards that are supposed to return from cards that are exiled for good.

Note: Older players may remember the phrase "remove from the game". That phrase was expunged from all cards in their Oracle text, and replaced with "exile". This zone was called the "removed-from-game zone", and is now called the "exile zone". This was changed with the M10 rules update. Note that before this update, **Cunning Wish** and friends were allowed to retrieve cards removed from the game, but this was reverted when the exile zone was introduced: now they can only access cards in sideboards.

Exiling face down

By default, objects are exiled "face up", so that any player may see that card. When a card is exiled face down, sometimes the effect that exiles it specify which player can look at it. That player will be allowed to see the card for as long as it remains exiled, even if they lose control of the permanent that exiled it.

Example. ***Bane Alley Broker** has an ability that allows you to draw and then exile a card face down. Then, it has a separate ability that allows you to look at the exiled cards. Even if Bane Alley Broker leaves the battlefield, you can still look at the cards exiled with it, since there was a time in the past when an effect allowed you to do so.*



Command

The command zone is a zone where special objects can have an effect on the game. It's also used by game variants to store special cards. The things that exist in the command zone are:

- **Emblems**, such as the one created by **Elsbeth, Sun's Champion**'s last ability. Emblems are created in the command zone, and remain there for the rest of the game. Note that *emblems are not permanents*, and there is currently no way at all for players to destroy an emblem or interact with it in any other way.
- **Commanders**. In the **Commander** casual variant, a single legendary creature is put in this zone at the beginning of the game. Some of these have abilities that can trigger or be activated from the command zone.
- **Planes**, used for the **Planechase** casual variant.
- **Schemes**, used for the **Archenemy** casual variant.

Phases and steps

In this section we analyze how a turn is divided, how the game flows through a turn, and the characteristic of each phase and step.

Each turn consists of five **phases**:

Beginning phase

Pre-combat main phase

Combat phase

Post-combat main phase

Ending phase




With the exception of the two main phases, each phase is further broken down into **steps**:

Beginning phase	Untap step
	Upkeep step
	Draw step
Pre-combat main phase	
Combat phase	Beginning of combat step
	Declare attackers step
	Declare blockers step
	Combat damage step
	End of combat step
Post-combat main phase	
End phase	End step
	Cleanup step

Other than the name, there is no difference between phases and steps. They both function identically.^[1]

With the exception of the untap step and the cleanup step, players receive priority in each step. A phase or step ends when both players pass priority in succession when the stack is empty. Simply having the stack become empty does not cause a phase or step to end. This is discussed in detail in the [Timing and priority](#) chapter.

When a phase or step ends, any unspent mana left in a player's mana pool empties.

Example. *I attack with **Radha, Heir to Keld**. Her triggered ability adds   to my mana pool. I can spend this mana only during the declare attackers step, for example to cast **Searing Blood** to dispatch a possible blocker. However, if my opponent blocks Radha with **Death Charmer**, I won't be able to use this mana to pay  and prevent the life loss, as during the declare blockers step my mana pool will have already emptied.*



Turn-based actions

As the game progresses through a turn, some steps require the players to perform a specific action. These actions are called **turn-based actions**. Turn-based actions do not use the stack and cannot be responded to. Players don't receive priority in those steps until the appropriate turn-based action has been performed.

The following is a list of the turn-based actions and when they occur:

Beginning phase	Untap step	Active player untaps his permanents.
	Upkeep step	
	Draw step	Active player draws a card.
Pre-combat main phase		
Combat phase	Beginning of combat step	
	Declare attackers step	Active player chooses which creatures will attack.
	Declare blockers step	Non-active player chooses which creatures will block, then active player declares the damage assignment order.
	Combat damage step	Both players assign combat damage, then damage is dealt.
	End of combat step	
Post-combat main phase		

End phase	End step	
	Cleanup step	Active player discards down to seven cards. Damage is removed from all creatures.

Example. *I control a **Mutavault** and plan to attack with it. The last opportunity to animate it is the beginning of combat step. If I proceed to the declare attackers step without activating the **Mutavault**, the rules require me to declare attackers first, while **Mutavault** is still a land. Note that since turn-based actions do not use the stack, it cannot be animated in response to the declaration of attackers.*



- I. ↑ Before **Magic 2010**, unused mana would empty from mana pools only as phases ended, not steps. This is no longer the case.

Beginning phase

The beginning phase is divided into three steps:

- Untap step
- Upkeep step
- Draw step

Each of these step has some peculiarity, so let's see each of them in detail.

Untap step

During this step you untap all permanents that are tapped. This action doesn't use the stack and you can not choose to leave a permanent tapped, unless some effect tells you can, as seen on **Vedalken Shackles**. In this case, first you determine which permanents untap and which remain tapped, then untap the appropriate permanents at the same time.

No player receives priority during this step, which means once all permanents have been untapped the game will proceed directly to the upkeep step. If some ability triggers during the untap step, it will wait until the upkeep step to go on the stack.

Example. ***Undiscovered Paradise** returns to your hand during the untap step, since it's **not** a triggered ability. It creates a new rule for the game, that states that you take this card back in your hand during the untap step. Weird old school Magic.*

***Vedalken Shackles'** untap choice is taken during the untap step, you can even think about it but the game will not see it, it will just leave it tapped or untap it according to your desire.*



Upkeep step

This step is traditionally used for permanents that require some cost to be paid turn after turn. Not many cards do this anymore, but it's still a strategically relevant moment in the turn, since it's the first time any player can act.

No turn-based actions are performed in this step, so all abilities that go off during the upkeep step are standard triggered abilities that go onto the stack and can be responded to.

Example. *I break your combo during your turn using a **Pact of Negation**, but I only control four lands! However, at the beginning of my upkeep, the delayed triggered ability generated by Pact of Negation will go onto the stack, and I will have the chance to respond to it and find a way to stay alive: perhaps with **Dark Ritual**, **Angel's Grace** or **Stifle**.*



Draw step

Each player's favorite step, I guess! The turn-based action performed in this step is, as you can easily guess, drawing a card. Then, and only then, sick cards' triggers like Howling Mine's will be put onto the stack. Then players receive priority as normal.

Example. *Note the importance of recognizing the difference between turn-based actions and triggers! After the upkeep step, the first thing that will happen upon entering the draw step will be the turn-based action that will cause the active player to draw a card. Only after that will we proceed to put any triggered ability on the stack!*



Main phase

Welcome to the part of your turn where the bulk of your plays happen!

This phase begins with a turn action: active player puts a lore counter on each [Saga](#) they control, which will likely cause their abilities to trigger, then players receive priority as normal. Most of the cards can be played only in this specific phase: This is when you play your land and cast creatures, sorceries, enchantments and artifacts.

There are actually two main phases in a regular turn: before and after the combat phase, and so they are generally called "pre-combat main phase" and "post-combat main phase", just to distinguish them. Of course, even if you have two main phases, you can only play a single land per turn.

Example. *If we have a counterspell war over a spell I played in my pre-combat main phase and I win it by using a **Mana Drain**, I will receive the ⓧ mana in the post-combat main phase. If I resolve Mana Drain in my post-combat main phase, I'll receive the mana in the pre-combat main phase of my next turn.*



Combat phase

In this phase, the creatures you have on the battlefield will rumble with your opponents' and try to damage your enemies. In the same fashion of the other phases, the combat phase is divided into five steps, and as soon as the combat phase begins, its first step begins as well.

The combat phase invariably happens every turn, even if there are no creatures on the battlefield. This can be relevant when something triggers *at the beginning of combat* or something like that, and entering a "fake" combat step is a popular trick to force mana pools to empty.

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Beginning of combat step

This step seems trivial but it's actually very dense. Any abilities that trigger *at the beginning of combat* go on the stack now, then players may cast spells and activate abilities.

This is the last time players can play stuff before the declaration of attackers, which means that if you plan to attack with that **Mutavault** or **Glint Hawk Idol** you have to animate it *right now*. However, there's almost never a strict necessity to wait until so late to do this - we'll discuss the subtleties in the [tricks](#) section.

This step is also the most strategically sound time to use effects that tap or bounce creatures in order to prevent them from attacking, since the active player can neither cast non-instant spells nor move equipments around before the combat ends.

Example. You control a **Lord of Atlantis** equipped with an **Umezawa's Jitte** and a **Mutavault**. You enter your beginning of combat step and activate Mutavault, which your opponent lets you do. However, after Mutavault's ability resolves, your opponent casts **Twiddle** on your Lord of Atlantis to tap it and prevent it from attacking.

Since you're already in your combat phase, you can't activate Umezawa's Jitte to equip it to the Mutavault - not until the combat is over, which would be quite pointless!



Declare attackers step

As soon as this step begins, the active player declares the attackers. There's no time for animating or tapping stuff any more: that's exactly why the beginning of combat exists at all!

Declaring attackers is a game action that doesn't use the stack, so it cannot be responded to. If defending player controls one or more planeswalkers, or you're playing a multiplayer game that allows to attack several players at once, the active player must declare, for each attacking creature, which player or planeswalker the creature is attacking. If you omit to do this in a duel, it's implied that you're sending all of your creatures after your opponent.

Some effects involving an attacking creature may refer to "defending player": this is the player that creature is attacking (if it is attacking a player) or the controller of the planeswalker that creature is attacking (if it is attacking a planeswalker).

Remember that attacking creatures are chosen simultaneously. This whole process, even if it requires some time to be completed, is considered a single action. During all this time the opponent can't intervene in any way, and until the player finalizes the declaration in a legal and complete way he can change his mind about it.

Note: In real game, players will not declare "This is my final set of attackers." every turn, since this is usually not necessary. However, disagreement can arise on this point, and sometimes the active player may want to change his mind, but the defending player doesn't let him. In these cases, since no clear-cut limit is defined, it's up to the judge to decide if the declaration is finished or not. Some careful players, when they realize they need some time to declare attackers, will say something like: "I'm making some tries, I will tell you when I'm done." or something like that. This good practice will clear all doubts.

Usually, declaring attackers is a quick affair. When things become complicated, we have a step-by-step procedure to handle it. If, at any time during this process, the active player is not able to complete even one of the step below, the entire declaration is considered illegal and rewind. The play will go back to the beginning of this step, all actions taken until that point will be canceled, and the active player will have to propose a new set of attackers.

1. The active player chooses which creatures that he or she controls, if any, will attack. The chosen creatures must be untapped, and each one must either have haste or have been controlled by the active player continuously since the beginning of the turn.^[1] For each of the chosen creatures, the active player

chooses an opponent or a planeswalker controlled by an opponent for that creature to attack. Then he or she determines whether this set of attackers is legal.

2. The active player taps each creature he chose to attack with, except those that have **vigilance**. Tapping a creature when it's declared as an attacker isn't a cost; attacking simply causes creatures to become tapped.
3. If one or more of the chosen creatures require paying costs to attack, the active player determines the total cost to attack. Costs may include paying mana, tapping permanents, sacrificing permanents, discarding cards, and so on. Once the total cost is determined, it becomes "locked in": even if it changes after this time, ignore this change.
4. If any of the costs require mana, the active player has now a chance to activate mana abilities.
5. Once the player has enough mana in his or her mana pool, he or she pays all the costs in any order. Partial payments are not allowed.
6. Finally, each chosen creature becomes an **attacking creature** if all costs have been paid, if **restrictions and requirements** were respected and if it's still controlled by the active player. It remains an attacking creature until it's removed from combat or the combat phase ends, whichever comes first.

After the declaration of attackers, abilities that have triggered are put onto the stack and then the active player receives priority.

Example. Cards like **Propaganda** or **Ghostly Prison** add an additional cost that applies to all creatures: in this case, they add 2 to each attacking creature. **Leviathan**, on the other hand, has an intrinsic cost that applies to itself only.

These costs are cumulative: if a Leviathan is declared as an attacker and defending player controls both a Propaganda and a Ghostly Prison, the total cost to attack will be a whopping "4, Sacrifice two Islands". Since the total cost to attack includes a mana payment, the active player can activate mana abilities during step 4. During step 5, he will spend this mana and sacrifice two Islands - possibly the same he drew mana from in step 4.



Tricks

The combat phase is obviously critical for the outcome of every game. Players will try to trick their opponents into sub-optimal plays, leveraging the numerous times priority goes back and forth. While we don't support rules lawyering and communication ambiguity, we should not reward players for their sloppiness.

It's very important that the players are correct and use a clear, technically appropriate language. In case of a disagreement, it will be a judge's duty to "translate" the words said by the two players in a technical language. To avoid forcing the players to clearly spell out every priority pass (which would be a mind-numbing exercise), some widely used **shortcuts** have been defined. While a complete discussion of this topic is beyond our scope, let's review the main points of communication in combat.

- If the active player passes priority or makes some declaration or question that implies he's passing priority while the stack is empty, his opponent can pass priority himself to have the current step end: at

this point, the active player will not have a chance to play during this step.

- On the other hand, if the defending player asks "Are you doing something?", he's asking the opponent to pass priority. If the active player passes and the defending player says that, after all, he doesn't really want to play anything, the active player can request to rollback the game to the time he passed priority. In brief, you can't request priority and then do nothing. If you exceed in rushing your opponent, you even risk to commit an Unsporting Conduct infraction.

Example. The active player controls a **Mutavault** and a **Chameleon Colossus**, but suspects his opponent might have a **Cryptic Command** and is only waiting for him to animate his Mutavault to tap down his team. So he asks his opponent if he would like to play something, trying to get some additional information. Asking the opponent a question like this is equal to pass priority. If the opponent's response is "No, I have nothing to play", the beginning of combat is over and the active player has now to declare the attackers: it's too late to animate his Mutavault and attack with it.

However, if the non-active player actually casts his Cryptic Command, the game stays in the beginning of combat step and there's plenty of time to activate Mutavault.



Declare blockers step

As soon as this step begins, the defending player declares the blockers. There's no time for animating or untapping stuff any more: all these duties should be carried out during the declare attackers step.

In brief, this declaration is almost the same as the declaration of the attackers, with the following differences:

- creatures must be untapped to be able to block, but blocking *never* causes them to become tapped;
- for each creature declared as a blocker, the defending player must choose an attacking creature to block;
- evasion abilities of attacking creatures (such as flying or shadow) are considered as **restrictions** when verifying if a set of blockers is legal.

Sometimes, the defending player will assign more than one blocker to the same attacker. This technique, colloquially known as *gang blocking*, is perfectly legal but introduces a new step in the process: the attacking player will have to decide how the attacking creature will deal with multiple foes.



Why attack together?

As part of the declaration of blockers, for each attacking creature that was blocked by more than one creature, the active player will *order* the blockers. The easiest way to think of this is in terms of a Hong Kong action movie:^[2] your attacking Bruce Lee will be confronted by several opponents, that will engage him *one at a time*. After Lee dispatches the first one, the second one will step in, and so on.

In game terms, this order will affect the way damage will be dealt in the [next step](#). At the moment, we just have to remember to order the creatures where applicable (*no one* ever remembers that, of course). Also, in the rare occurrence that a creature can block multiple attackers, those attackers will be ordered as well (by the defending player).

Just like we did for the declaration of attackers, we present here a complete step by step procedure that should be followed when the board situation becomes hairy.

1. The defending player chooses which creatures that he or she controls, if any, will block. The chosen creatures must be untapped. For each of the chosen creatures, the defending player chooses one creature for it to block that's attacking him, her, or a planeswalker he or she controls. Then he or she determines whether this set of blocks is legal.
2. If one or more of the creatures require paying costs to block, the defending player determines the total cost to block. Costs may include paying mana, tapping permanents, sacrificing permanents, discarding cards, and so on. Once the total cost is determined, it becomes "locked in": even if it changes after this time, ignore this change.
3. If any of the costs require mana, the defending player has now a chance to activate mana abilities.
4. Once the player has enough mana in his or her mana pool, he or she pays all costs in any order. Partial payments are not allowed.
5. Finally, each chosen creature becomes a **blocking creature**, but only if it's still controlled by the defending player. Each one is **blocking** the attacking creature that was chosen for it. It remains a blocking creature until it's removed from combat or the combat phase ends, whichever comes first. If requirements and restrictions, following the same rule valid for the previous step are not respected, the

declaration is illegal and we must restart from the beginning. At the same time, each attacking creature with one or more creatures declared as blockers for it becomes a **blocked creature**, and each one with no blockers becomes an **unblocked creature**. This remains unchanged until the creature is removed from combat or the combat phase ends, whichever comes first. (Some effects can change whether a creature is blocked or unblocked.)

Immediately after the declaration of blockers, creatures that are gang blocking must be ordered. Then abilities that have triggered are put onto the stack and the active player receives priority.

Example. Some abilities like **ninjutsu** require that we do something with an unblocked creature (in ninjutsu's case, bounce it). No creature can ever be in the "unblocked" state before the declaration of blockers, hence we can't activate this ability before the defending player has had a chance to block.



Combat triggers

In the step by step procedures above, we've specified when exactly each creature gains the status^[3] of "attacking", "blocking", "blocked", or "unblocked" creature. This allows the existence of some cards designed to interact only with attacking and/or blocking creatures. To properly handle cards like **Condemn** and its ilk, we have to know exactly when this status is gained and when it is lost.

We've also mentioned that abilities can trigger when creatures enter combat. These abilities are written as "*when [one or more creatures] attack(s)*" or *block(s)*, and only get to trigger during the last step of the aforementioned procedures. They're very similar to abilities that trigger when a permanent becomes tapped: they look for a *transition* of a permanent with certain characteristics from "not attacking" to "attacking".

They will not trigger if a creature attacks and then its characteristics change to match the ability's trigger condition, since the permanent was not matching when the transition happened; they will not trigger if a creature will be put onto the battlefield as an attacker, since no transition ever occurred.

Example. ***Righteous Cause** will trigger once for each creature that gains the "attacking" status; it doesn't matter if it will finish or not the combat. It will not trigger for creatures put onto the battlefield already attacking from **Militia's Pride**, because they never "become" attackers, they're already attacking when they are created.*



It gets even subtler than this as we move to consider abilities that trigger for creatures becoming blocked. The following two abilities are very different from each other:

- "When this creature becomes blocked, <do something>."
- "When this creature becomes blocked by a creature, <do something>."

The first ability triggers only the first time the creature becomes blocked that combat. It will trigger if a creature becomes blocked by a creature declared as a blocker, by a creature that's put onto the battlefield as a blocker, or by an effect, but only if the attacking creature hadn't yet been blocked that combat. They will not trigger if a creature becomes blocked, and then the blocking creature's characteristics change to match the ability's trigger condition, and will only trigger at most once, regardless of the number of creatures that gang block that specific attacker.

The second ability, on the other one, triggers each time a creature becomes a blocker of that specific attacker. The most common case is when several creatures gang block: such an ability will trigger once for each of them.

Example. When **Ichorclaw Myr** becomes blocked, it will always net a +2/+2, even if it's blocked by more than one creature. **Cave Tiger**, on the other hand, will gain a cumulative +1/+1 for each blocker.

If **Ichorclaw Myr** is already blocked by a creature and then a **Flash Foliage** targeting it resolves, the Myr's ability will not trigger: the Myr is not changing its state to "blocked". On the other hand, if the same thing happens with a **Cave Tiger**, the Tiger will trigger again.



If a creature is put onto the battlefield attacking, its controller chooses which defending player or which planeswalker a defending player controls it's attacking as it comes onto the battlefield, unless the effect that puts it onto the battlefield specifies what it's attacking. If a creature is put onto the battlefield blocking, its controller chooses which attacking creature it's blocking as it comes onto the battlefield, unless the effect that puts it onto the battlefield specifies what it's blocking. Such creatures are "attacking" or "blocking" but, for the purposes of trigger events and effects, they never "attacked" or "blocked."

Example. When **Brimaz, King of Oreskos** attacks and spawns his little friend, it says that it's attacking but not who it's attacking, so as you put it onto the battlefield you pick a player or planeswalker for it to attack. On the other hand, when Brimaz blocks, he puts onto the battlefield a blocking Cat Soldier, and specifies that it's blocking the same creature as him. You don't get to pick anything.



Combat damage step



We have a whole chapter devoted to such frivolities.

Now that each creature willing to enter combat has chosen its opponent, it's time to actually cross blades! As this step begins, creatures will assign and deal damage to their foes. Then state-based effects will dispose of the corpses, triggered abilities will be put onto the stack, and at last the active player will receive priority.

Note that players cannot act between the time damage is assigned, the time it is actually dealt and the time creatures with lethal damage are destroyed.^[4] If you meant to pump your creature with a **Giant Growth**, regenerate it, or **Humble** your opponent's **Reveillark**, tough luck! That's the kind of things you're supposed to do during the declare blockers step.

Each creature will assign damage equal to its power. Specifically, each unblocked creature will assign its combat damage to the player or planeswalker it is attacking; each blocked creature will assign its damage to its blocker(s); each blocking creature will assign its damage to the creature(s) it's blocking. Immediately after this damage is assigned, it's actually dealt by the creatures, and its **effects** are applied immediately.

Creatures can't voluntarily "opt out" of combat: they will always assign and deal damage, if possible. However, creatures with a power of 0 or less and creatures left without a recipient for their damage will neither assign nor deal combat damage at all. This may happen, for example, if its blocking creature has been bounced to safety, or the planeswalker it was going to wipe out has been sacrificed by his or her ruthless employer.

Some creatures have abilities that trigger when they deal damage. In all the cases above, these abilities would not trigger at all.

Sometimes, an attacking creature will be gang blocked by several small ones (or, more rarely, a defender will be able to block several attackers). These are the cases when the *damage assignment order* that you chose at the time blockers were declared becomes relevant. We'll assume we're dealing with a gang blocking, since the opposite case is very similar and much rarer.

The blockers will all assign damage to their attacker. The latter will have to fight the first creature, and is forced to assign at least **lethal damage** to it. Then it will turn towards the second creature and assign at least lethal damage to it, and so on. Note that it's always possible to assign more damage to a creature than strictly necessary - possibly it has some [prevention shields](#) on it. After damage is assigned, it is all dealt simultaneously.

Lethal damage is defined as an amount of damage equal to the creature's toughness minus any damage already marked on it. At this time, we can't be sure this damage will literally be "lethal" for the blocker: it might have protection of a relevant kind, or be indestructible. This is irrelevant: the definition of lethal damage stands.

Example. The active player controls a **Enormous Baloth**, the non-active player controls a **Grizzly Bears**, a **Giant Spider** and a **Blastoderm**. In its first main phase, the active player casts **Pyroclasm** (which kills the Grizzly Bear and damages the other creatures), then attacks. The defending player blocks with both creatures, and the active player decides it will deal damage to Giant Spider first, Blastoderm second.

After seeing how blocking creatures are ordered, the defending player casts **Giant Growth** targeting Giant Spider. Then the combat step begins: Blastoderm assigns 5 damage to Enormous Baloth, Giant Spider assigns 5 more damage to it, the Baloth must assign lethal damage to the first blocker, Giant(er) Spider. The Spider is now a 5/7 with 2 damages marked, which means the Baloth must assign at least $7 - 2 = 5$ damage to it, and the rest to whichever creature. It chooses to assign 2 damage to Blastoderm.

The Baloth is dealt a grand total of 10 damage, the Spider receives 5 and the Blastoderm 2. State-based actions see that the Baloth and the Spider have damage equal or greater than their toughness, and destroy them. The Blastoderm has suffered 4 damage, and lives on.



Special rules

Some abilities modify the way damage is assigned. Let's look at the most common cases.

- Creatures with **trample** will not be stopped by lesser blockers. After all its blockers have been assigned at least lethal damage, any remaining damage can be assigned to the player or planeswalker it's attacking. This implies that, in case each blocker leaves combat, all damage will spill through. Note that creatures

can never trample over a planeswalker, even when their damage is more than enough to remove all their loyalty counters.

- Creatures with **first strike** or **double strike** have a chance to slay their enemies before they can respond. At the start of the combat damage step, if at least one attacking or blocking creature has first strike or double strike, creatures without first strike or double strike don't assign combat damage. Instead of proceeding to end of combat, the phase gets a second combat damage step to handle the remaining creatures. In the second combat damage step, any attackers and blockers that didn't assign combat damage in the first step, plus any creatures with double strike, assign their combat damage.
- Other creatures have static abilities that modify damage assignment (e.g. **Rhox**). Their controller must decide if he wants to use this ability or have them deal damage normally at this time, and can't change its mind later. It's not possible to make "partial" decision: you assign all damage normally or all damage according to the ability.

Effects of damage

It is important to understand the way damage works, as to handle properly cards that affect it. Damage is always **dealt** by a source; then it generates a detrimental effect to its recipient:

- If the recipient is a player, he or she loses life equal to the damage it's dealt.
- If the recipient is a planeswalker, that many loyalty counters are removed from it.
- If the recipient is a creature, that much damage is marked on it. ^[5]

Some abilities affect damage that's dealt, others affect its result. The two should never be confused. The following keyword abilities are very common:

- If a source has **infect**, the effect of damage it deals are that many -1/-1 counters if the recipient is a creature, and that many poison counters if it's a player. Note that this counters are given *instead* of the normal effect.
- If a source has **wither**, the effect of damage it deals are that many -1/-1 counters if the recipient is a creature (damaged players will simply lose life as usual).
- If a source has **lifelink**, its damage has an additional effect: the controller of the source gains that much life.

Example. The card that's more likely to create peculiar interactions with effects of damage is **Worship**. It doesn't generate a prevention effect: all damage is dealt regularly. Instead, Worship modifies the effect of damage: if the effect would be to lower the life of Worship's controller to 0 or less, instead the effect will lower it to 1.

Let's say that an **Excruciator** equipped with a **Loxodon Warhammer** is attacking a player at 5 life that controls both **Worship** and a creature. That player is dealt a full 10 damage. This damage would result in that player losing 10 life, which would bring his life total to -5. However, **Worship** replaces this, and the player only loses 4 life, dropping at 1. The other effect of damage, generated by **lifelink**, is unaffected, so **Excruciator**'s controller gains a full 10 life. **Excruciator**'s ability has no effect, since **Worship** is not trying to prevent damage.



Note that all effects of damage are simultaneous: if you lose life to an attacker but gain life from a defender with lifelink, you're considered to gain and lose this amount of life with regards to abilities that trigger from it, but you adjust your life total only once.

Example. *I'm at 1 life and I control a **Pillarfield Ox** enchanted with **Unflinching Courage**. My opponent is attacking me with two **Canyon Minotaurs**, and I block one of them with my Ox. As damage is dealt all at the the same time, I'll simultaneously gain 4 life and lose 3 life, so after combat damage is dealt I'll be at 2 life.*

*Now let's replace Unflinching Courage with its ancestor **Armadillo Cloak**, which hails from a time when lifelink didn't exist^[6] and creatures whose damage gained you life did this through a triggered ability. In this case, I'll lose 3 life and Armadillo Cloak will trigger... but it never gets to be put onto the stack, as I'll be already dead by then at -2 life!*



End of combat step

As the end of combat step begins, all "at end of combat" abilities trigger and go on the stack. Then the active player gets priority and players may cast spells and activate abilities. During this step, the creatures are still considered in combat, so it's still possible to cast spells that affect attacking or blocking creatures.

Example. *Let's say we are furiously racing, and to win this game I need to both deal damage with my unblocked creatures and gain some life by **Condemning** one of them. This is perfectly feasible: I will attack you as normal, and then cast Condemn in the end of combat step.*



As soon as the end of combat step ends, all creatures and planeswalkers are removed from combat and are not attacking, attacked, blocking, blocked or unblocked any more. Once the end of combat step ends, the combat phase is over and the second main phase begins.

Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



Restrictions and requirements



Did you know it
was once
banned?

There's a number of effects that mess with the way attackers or blockers are declared, limiting players' choices. These are divided in two classes, **restrictions** and **requirements**.

- Restrictions are effects that forbid a particular combination of attackers. They may restrict the global declaration (**Dueling Grounds**) or concern just a single creature (**Hulking Cyclops**).
- Requirements are effects that force a choice upon a player. They may affect the global declaration (**War's Toll**) or bind a single creature (**Juggernaut**'s first ability).

Sometimes, several such effects will interact to form a very confusing situation. In these cases, we apply the **Three Laws of Magic Combat**^[7]:

1. A player is never forced to pay costs to attack or block. If a creature can't attack or block unless you pay a cost, you're always free of ignore it for the purposes of determining a legal set of attackers. However, if you choose to pay said costs, it will be fully bound by all applicable effects.
2. A player must obey all restrictions, except where such restrictions would conflict with the First Law. If you end up violating a restriction, **you're doing it wrong**.
3. A player must obey as many requirements as possible, as long as such requirements don't conflict with the First or Second Law. Count the total number of requirements, and how many of them you are obeying. If you could satisfy more requirements without infringing any restrictions, **your attack is invalid**.

Note that tapped creatures are always ignored when computing legal attacks, and evasive abilities generate restrictions.

Example. Let's say we control **Juggernaut**, **Otarian Juggernaut**, a **Lodestone Golem** (or any vanilla creature, actually) and a **Dueling Grounds**. We're trying to declare an attack. The restriction from Dueling Ground must be obeyed no matter what, so we'll be able to attack with up to one creature. We now take into account the requirements from the Juggernauts:

1. Only Juggernaut attacks. We obey one requirement out of two.
2. Only Otarian Juggernaut attacks. We obey one requirement out of two.
3. Only the Lodestone Golem attacks. We obey zero requirements out of two.
4. No creature attacks. We obey zero requirements out of two.

Since options 3 and 4 respect zero requirements and a declaration exists that satisfies a greater amount of requirements, they are illegal. We can only choose which Juggernaut will attack.



Example. The active player controls one each of **Juggernaut**, **Darksteel Juggernaut**, and **Leveler**; the defending player controls a **Wall of Junk** and a **Crawlspace**. The active player can't attack with the Leveler, since leaving either Juggernaut at bay would violate its requirement; so, the only legal attack is to send Juggernaut and Darksteel Juggernaut. Defending player casts **Blaze of Glory**^[8] on his Wall of Junk; however, he's unable to fulfill its requirement (that asks the Wall to block all creatures), since the restriction on Juggernaut overrides it. Wall of Junk will have to block Darksteel Juggernaut.



Example. The active player controls a **Taunting Elf** equipped with **Infiltration Lens**, a **Taunting Elf** enchanted by **Lure**, and a **Juggernaut**; the defending player controls a **Wall of Glare** and a **Wall of Junk**. The active player attacks with his three creatures. Wall of Glare can block any number of creatures, so blocking both Taunting Elves will maximize the number of requirements. Wall of Junk, on the other hand, can only block the Taunting Elf enchanted with Lure: this will satisfy two requirements (Taunting Elf and Lure), whereas blocking the other Elf would satisfy only one.



1. ↑ The rule that prevents a creature you just played from attacking is usually called "summoning sickness", since the original explanation was that the creature was too confused from the trip through the Blind Eternities to be able to rush forward immediately.
2. ↑ Actually, *everything* should be defined in terms of Hong Kong action movies. But I digress.
3. ↑ Be careful: we're using "status" in its plain English meaning here. We're not referring to the technical meaning the word has in **Magic**.
4. ↑ Some player may ramble about "putting damage on the stack" and other such things. Don't listen, those are just musings of a fool! This is how the game is played now, and how it was always meant to be played - I've got a full pile of booklets from *Alpha* through *Urza's Saga* that prove this.
5. ↑ There's some ambiguity here, since we use the term *damage* to indicate both the damage that's dealt by sources and its effect on creatures.
6. ↑ And names were allowed to be much goofier than today
7. ↑ Yes, I just made these up.
8. ↑ Make sure to click the link and read the Oracle text: the actual card is not the most readable.

Ending phase

The ending phase is divided into two steps:

- End step
- Cleanup step

End step

The end step is quite simple: there is no turn-based action scheduled to happen here, and players receive priority as normal. Akin to the upkeep step, it's strategically relevant because it's the last time any player can act in a given turn - control decks will usually cast draw spells in their opponents' end step, for example. In general, when a player says he wants to cast something "at end of turn" or "before my turn", he's acting in the end step.

The end step is also a moment when many triggered abilities go off. These abilities used to be written as "*At end of turn, [do something]*", but to make it more clear that they actually trigger in this step, they're now worded as "*At the beginning of the end step, [do something]*". Very often, these are **delayed triggered abilities** meant to clean up after some effect. In case the end step has already begun when these delayed triggered are created, they'll wait for the next turn's end step to trigger.

Example. ***Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker** creates a temporary clone of a creature, and does so by putting a token onto the battlefield, and then disposing of it with a delayed triggered ability that goes off at the end of turn. However, if I activate my Kiki-Jiki in my opponent's end step, the triggered will not go off this turn (as the end step has already begun), so I can untap, activate Kiki-Jiki again and attack with both tokens, which will die at the end of my turn.*



Cleanup step

During a regular cleanup step, players don't receive priority and so can't play anything. The only thing that happens in the cleanup step are a number of turn-based actions:

1. First, the active player discards to to his maximum hand size (normally seven).
2. Second, all damage marked on creatures is removed, and at the same time all effects that last "until end of turn" and "this turn" end.
3. Last, we check if any **state-based actions** must be performed or any **triggered abilities** are waiting to be put onto the stack.

If there are neither state-based actions nor triggered abilities to handle, the turn ends and no player receives priority in the cleanup step. However, if we need to do these things, players *do* receive priority and can play during this step. If this happens, a new cleanup step begins after this one. We go on until we have an cleanup step with no state-based action nor triggered ability, after which the turn can finally end.

Example. I control **Planar Void** and have eight cards in hand when my turn ends, so I discard a card. I do so as the cleanup step begins. Now, since this action triggered Planar Void's ability, we put it onto the stack and I receive priority. Both me and my opponent can play something in response to Planar Void's ability or after it has resolved. Once the ability has resolved and all players have passed priority with an empty stack, a new cleanup step will begin: I discard again to seven cards, damage is removed from creatures and "this turn" effects end. Hopefully nothing else happens this time and a new turn actually begins.



On the stack

In paper Magic, casting and resolving spells is a very straightforward process. I turn a Mountain sideways and put my **Lightning Bolt** on your **Liliana of the Veil**. You nod and put the planeswalker in your graveyard. However, for the educated mind of a judge, this simple play is expanded into a myriad of nuanced technicalities which we will explore in the following sections. While we cannot expect players to play in a strictly technical fashion, we must be able to map their actions to the correct procedure in order to untangle complex scenarios.

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2. [Resolving spells](#)
3. [Countering spells](#)
4. [Changing targets](#)



Now that's a stack!

In this chapter we're going to follow the life cycle of a spell: how spells are **cast**, how spells **resolve**, what happens if it is **countered**, or even if it is **redirected** somewhere else. For now we will focus on the process followed for each of these actions. In the later chapters we'll look at how players **interact with each other**.

Casting a spell

To cast a spell, you just lay it on the table and turn some lands sideways, right? Well... not *quite*. Casting spells, one of the most basic things that we do in every **Magic** game, is described in minute detail by the Comprehensive Rules. Let's start by looking at the game definition of what a "spell" actually is, then discuss in some detail the process to cast a spell.

Contents

- 1 What is a spell?
- 2 "Cast" vs. "play"
- 3 Parts of the process
 - 3.1 Step 1: Announce the spell
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 - 3.3 Step 3: Choose targets
 - 3.4 Step 4: Divide and distribute
 - 3.5 Step 5: Calculate costs
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 - 3.7 Step 7: Pay the piper

What is a spell?

A spell is *a card on the stack* (or a copy of a card on the stack). This means that spells are only considered to be spells while they are *on the stack*. Once they enter the battlefield, they are *permanents*, and everywhere else they are *cards*. While this is a very subtle difference, you will discover that there are times when this has a huge impact on how things work.

Example. *Meddling Mage* says the named card can't be cast. Since *Isochron Scepter*'s ability allows you to play a copy of the imprinted card, not an actual card, it is not prevented by the ability of *Meddling Mage*.



"Cast" vs. "play"

Magic has been around for a *long* time. Back in the day, we used to "play" spells.^[1] Now we "cast" spells, because, well, that's a better word for it and because R&D said so. Of course, there isn't a magic button that

changes the text on all your old cards simply because we've decided that there's a better way to phrase it (unless you're playing **Magic Online**^[2]). So no matter what is printed on your card, you're *casting* the spell. Anything that triggers when you "play" a spell will trigger when you "cast" a spell. Got it? Good.

Some cards still use the word "play". The only thing you play nowadays is lands. If a card needs to instruct you to "cast something if it's a spell, or play it if it's a land", they'll shorthand this mouthful by saying you to "play it".

Example. ***Daxos of Meletis** exiles a card and tells you to cast it. This means that if you hit a land, you can't play it, as a land can never be cast. Let's compare Daxos's wording with **Nightveil Specter**'s: as the Specter says that you can play the exiled card, you are allowed to play it if it's a land or cast it if it's a spell.*



Parts of the process

So you've decided to cast a spell. Good for you. Oh wait, you don't have enough mana to cast it? No legal target to select? Someone has a card on the table that won't let you cast that spell? Back it on up, and we'll forget all about it. Well, except that everyone knows you have that card in your hand now, but the game won't force you to finish doing something you can't actually do. Move on.

In a tournament settings, this mistake may come with a penalty attached. In any case, you're never ever forced to **Terror** your own guy since you forgot that your opponent's **White Knight** has protection from black.

Of course, if you've already paid for the spell, and *then* you realize that your move wasn't strategically correct, or that you wanted to use different mana, it's too late. No take-backs.

Step 1: Announce the spell

The first step to cast a spell is to tell your opponent you want to do it. You take it from where it currently is (usually your hand) and add it on top of the stack. It's not in your hand anymore, or the graveyard, or wherever it was before you decided to cast it. *You* cast it, so *you* control it. Maybe your opponent will counter it, or maybe it will resolve, but until then, there it stays.

Example. *The first thing you do after announcing you're going to cast **Force of Will** is putting it onto the stack, which means it will not be in your hand when it's time to exile a blue card to pay the pitch cost.*



Step 2: Tell us what you want to do

Once you've decided what spell to cast, next you have to decide *how* you're going to cast it. If it lets you choose between different options, time to pick. If it gives you different payment options, select one (and *only* one - see examples below). Keep in mind that you're not actually paying for it right now, you're just deciding which method to use. This may mean that you have different options later on, so we need to know now. For example, if you announce that you want to kick **Rushing River**, you'll need to pick two targets rather than just one.

Here's a complete list of things that you need to announce in this step:

- if you splice any cards;
- if you intend to pay any additional cost (such as buyback or kicker) or you want to use an alternative cost (such as flashback or the "pitch a card" cost for **Force of Will**) - note that you can pick *one and only one* alternative cost;
- the value of X, if it's chosen by you rather than calculated by the game;
- how you are going to pay for hybrid and Phyrexian mana symbols.

Example. *If you use **Snapcaster Mage**'s ability to give flashback to the **Force of Will** in your graveyard, you can cast it, but you can't cast it by exiling a blue card in your hand, as flashback gives you permission to cast it from your graveyard only if you pay its flashback cost (that is an alternative cost), and you're not allowed to use two alternative costs at the same time.*



Step 3: Choose targets

If your spell contains any instances of the word "target", this is where you choose them. If at this point you discover your intended target is not legal, or you have no valid target, the entire casting of the spell is backed

up by the game rules (and your opponent thanks you for telling them one of the cards that are in your hand).

Keep in mind that some spells allow you to target the same object more than once, and other spells don't. Here's how you will tell the difference:

- If the spell contains the word **target** multiple times, you can choose the same object multiple times.
- If the spell asks for some number of "target" things, you must choose that many different objects.
- If the spell allows you to choose how many targets you select, you can only choose any one object once.
- If the spell contains the words "up to" before the number of targets, you can only choose any one object once, however, you can choose zero targets (unless the spell specifies otherwise) or any other number that is less than the total allowed.
- If the spell contains the words "any target", you can choose to target only creatures, planeswalkers or players.^[3]

At this point, each creature, player, or object "becomes the target" of your spell. Anything that triggers when something "becomes the target" will trigger here, but the trigger will wait to be put on the stack until after you have finished casting the spell (and since your spell is already on the stack at this time, any abilities that trigger upon it targeting will resolve before it does).

Example. If you cast **Hex** you must target exactly six creatures. You cannot choose the same creature twice, and you may be forced to target some creature of yours, in case your opponents has less than six.

If you cast **Downpour** you can target zero, one, two, or three creatures. You cannot choose the same creature twice, as the word "target" only appears once.

If you cast **Common Bond**, you can choose the same creature as the target for both counters, as the word "target" appears twice.



Step 4: Divide and distribute

Now that our targets have been selected, it's time to decide which target gets how much of whatever we have to distribute. Typically this is either counters or damage. If the spell allows us to choose the division, we do it now. Each target must receive *at least one* of whatever is being divided.

Sometimes a spell will say "divided equally." In these cases, there is no division to be determined. The spell will divide whatever it is equally among whatever legal targets remain when the spell resolves.

Example. You will need to decide how much damage you want to deal to each creature when you cast **Flames of the Firebrand**. By contrast, since **Fireball** says the damage is divided "evenly", you won't make any choice at this point. The damage will be divided and assigned during the resolution of the spell.



Step 5: Calculate costs

When you go to the grocery store, you select your items, take them to the checkout counter, and allow the checkout girl to ring up the total. Then you give her the coupons, she deducts them, and tells you what you'll have to pay. Casting a spell follows a similar procedure.

1. Start with the mana cost printed on the card, or the alternative casting cost you chose during step 2. Remember that you can only pay one alternative cost - you can't use the flashback cost and also a "play it without paying its mana cost" ability. Keep in mind that not all costs are mana payments. Sometimes the cost will include discarding a card or sacrificing a creature.
2. Then, add any additional costs (such as kicker or strive) or cost increases (such as **Thalia, Guardian of Thraben**).
3. Next, subtract any cost reductions. If your cost would be reduced to less than zero, it is reduced to zero. (We're dealing with coupons here, not rebates or gift certificates.)
4. Finally, if anything cares what the final cost is, take that into consideration. Currently, the only card this applies to is **Trinisphere**, which checks to see if the total cost includes less than three mana, and adds generic mana to it until there are three if it doesn't.

Now that we have our total cost, it's "locked in" and can't be changed. For example, if we have a creature with an ability that reduced the cost of the spell, and we sacrifice that creature to pay for the spell when it comes time to pay the costs, it won't change the fact that the final cost has already been reduced.

Example. **Thalia, Guardian of Thraben** is an example of a cost increase. **Heartless Summoning** is an example of a cost reduction.



Example. *Trinisphere's* ability is always checked last. If you want to cast **Path to Exile** on your opponent's pesky **Thalia, Guardian of Thraben**, you won't increase the cost to 2* and then add the extra mana from Thalia's ability. You'll apply Thalia's ability before, change the cost to 1*, then **Trinisphere** will see that it's still less than three and change it to 2*.



Note: A card's converted mana cost is different from the total cost we determine in this part of casting a spell, and unrelated to it. The converted mana cost is **always** a numeric representation of the cost printed on the card. **Nothing** can alter the converted mana cost of a spell. If the printed cost includes an X, the X is zero in all zones except the stack. While a spell is on the stack, X is the value that was chosen when you cast the spell. You can find more details on this topic in the [Colors, mana and costs](#) page.

Step 6: Activate mana abilities

Continuing with our grocery store analogy, this is the point where you pull the cash out of your wallet. At this point in casting a spell, you can tap lands or activate other mana abilities. Only the player who is casting the spell gets to activate mana abilities - don't try this while your opponents are casting their spells. Note that you can only activate [mana abilities](#), that have a very specific definition in the rules. For example, you can't cast **Dark Ritual** or activate **Arbor Elf** at this point.

Example. I control four lands and a **Deathrite Shaman**, and my opponent controls **Thalia, Guardian of Thraben**. I cast **Bloodbraid Elf**, tapping all my lands to pay for it, and proceed to resolve the cascade trigger. The first card I reveal is a **Lightning Bolt**, so I can't kill Thalia... but can I?

I don't receive priority between the time I reveal the Lightning Bolt and the time the cascade ability instructs me to cast it. However, I will follow all the steps outlined above to cast that spell, except that in step 5 cascade will replace the mana cost of the spell with "pay nothing", which Thalia will then increase to 1. In step 6, I have the chance to activate mana abilities - but Deathrite Shaman's is not a mana ability, since it has a target, so I won't be able to use it to generate mana at this time!


The correct play is, of course, to pay for Bloodbraid Elf using three lands and Deathrite Shaman, so that in case my cascade gives me a non-creature spell I can generate mana from a mana ability to satisfy Thalia.




Step 7: Pay the piper

To finish our grocery store analogy, we will now hand the payment to the cashier to complete the transaction. In Magic terms, we will now spend our mana, sacrifice creatures, discard cards, or do whatever is needed to pay for our spell. Partial payments are not allowed, and unpayable costs can't be paid.

If your spell has the convoke or delve ability, you may tap creatures or exile cards for your graveyard, respectively, instead of paying mana during this part of the casting process. Note that this is different from the way hybrid and Phyrexian mana works: I already announced how I wanted to pay for these symbols in step 2.

Example. Let's say I only control three lands and a **Wild Cantor**, and I need to cast **Chord of Calling** with $X=2$. Can I tap the Wild Cantor to reduce the Chord of Calling's cost by  using the convoke ability, and then sacrifice it to draw a fourth mana? The answer is no: I need to activate mana abilities in step 6 and then pay costs in step 7, so if I sacrifice Wild Cantor to draw mana it won't be around to be tapped when I pay for the spell.



Note: In the Magic Tournament Rules there is an established shortcut for cards with an X in their cost. If a player forgets to announce the value of X , it will automatically be all the remaining mana in their mana pool. For example, if a player taps six Mountains and casts a Fireball with only one target, the value of X will automatically be 5 (since the cost is , and one red mana will need to be paid in addition to the X).

Congratulations, you have now cast your spell! If there are any abilities that trigger when you cast a spell, they will now trigger and go onto the stack, then players will get priority. Now you can cast another spell... or just let this one resolve.

1. ↑ Actually, back *back* in the day, we already used to "cast" spells, then we started to "play" them.
2. ↑ Which means you probably have much bigger problems than terminology.
3. ↑ With the release of Dominaria over 700 cards received errata, to be able to also deal damage to planeswalkers. The simplest guidelines to remember are:
 - Abilities that read "target creature or player" have been changed to "any target."
 - Abilities that damage or prevent damage to "target player" have been changed to "target player or planeswalker." However, if the amount of damage is calculated by using information about that player or objects they control, the ability remains unchanged and can now damage only the player.
 - Abilities that damage "target opponent" have been changed to "target opponent or planeswalker" with the same exception listed above. These spells and abilities can target a planeswalker you control.
 - Abilities that deal damage but don't call for a target haven't received errata, with the only exception of [c]Vial Smasher the Fierce[/c].

Resolving spells

Each time all players pass in succession, the spell or ability on top of the stack resolves. What "resolving" actually means depends from the type of the object that's resolving.

Contents

- 1 Resolving instants, sorceries and abilities
 - 1.1 Check targets
 - 1.2 Perform instructions
 - 1.3 Leave the stack
- 2 Resolving permanent spells

Resolving instants, sorceries and abilities

Instant spells, sorcery spells and abilities resolve in a three step process:

Check targets

First, if the spell or ability specifies any targets, it checks if said targets are still legal. A spell or ability doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack if all of its target are now illegal. When a spell doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack because all of its targets are illegal, we colloquially use to say that it *fizzles*.

Example. ***Dark Betrayal** calls for a target, which must be a black creature. As Dark Betrayal begins resolving, we check if the target is still legal. If it's not - for example because it's not black any more, has gained protection from black, or has left the battlefield - Dark Betrayal doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack.*



If the spell still has at least one legal target, it will resolve. It will not be able to affect *in any way* a target that's become illegal, but will do as much as it can to legal targets.

Example. If I cast **Electrolyze** on a single target, for example a **Precinct Captain**, and it becomes illegal, **Electrolyze** won't resolve, it'll be removed from the stack and I will not draw a card.

On the other hand, if I cast **Electrolyze** on two different targets, for example two **Dark Confidants**, and one of those becomes an illegal target, **Electrolyze** will resolve and it will perform all the possible actions: it will deal one damage to the "legal" Dark Confidant and make me draw a card.



Perform instructions

After this check, the controller of the spell or ability follows its instruction in the order written.

Example. **Akroma's Vengeance** destroys each artifact, creature and enchantment as a single action, so all affected permanents are destroyed at the same time. If a **Boon Satyr** is on the battlefield, it's destroyed once, so you can save it with a single regeneration shield.

On the other hand, **Austere Command** performs the two action chosen one after the other. If I choose the second and the third modes, the Boon Satyr will be destroyed twice, and two regeneration shields will be needed to save it.



Sometimes, an instruction on a spell or ability requires both players to make choices or perform actions at the same time. In these cases, active player makes his choices first, then non-active player does - this is known as **APNAP order**. Then the actions are performed simultaneously. Then the spell moves to the next instruction.

Example. Each player loses 1 life, then the first choice for **Smallpox** is discarding a card. Active player chooses a card, then non-active players chooses a card, then all cards are discarded simultaneously. Since the hand is a hidden zone, players can't see each other's choice until the card is actually discarded. Let's move on: active player choose a creature to sacrifice, then non-active player chooses a creature, then all sacrifices happen simultaneously. Non-active player can see what active player has chosen before making his choice, because the battlefield is a public zone. The same happens for lands.



Drawing cards is an exception to this rule. If a spell instructs all players to draw some number of cards simultaneously, first the active player draws that number of cards, one card at a time; then the other players do

the same in turn order.

Example. We both control a **Laboratory Maniac** and have no cards left in our libraries. I activate the first ability of **Jace Beleren**. When the ability resolves, first I try to draw a card. The replacement effect of **Laboratory Maniac** is applied, so I win the game on the spot.



Leave the stack

The last step in the process of resolving a sorcery, instant or ability is to dispose of the object on the stack. If it's a spell, the associated card is put into its owner's graveyard; if it's an ability, the object on the stack simply ceases to exist. A notable implication of this is that a sorcery or instant card stays on the stack throughout its resolution, which means it's not in the graveyard to be counted, exiled or moved somewhere else, and it's a legal target for counterspells.

Example. Do you want to see a bad card? Look no further than **Ire of Kaminari**! You can cast it while your graveyard is empty (for example to trigger good man **Horobi, Death's Wail**), but since upon resolution **Ire of Kaminari** is still on the stack it would do a grand total of 0 damage to its target.

On the other hand, if my opponent casts **Counterspell** on my precious **Ire of Kaminari**, I can respond with **Ricochet Trap**. As **Ricochet Trap** is resolving, it's still a spell on the stack, which means it's a legal target for **Counterspell**. As such, I can change **Counterspell**'s target to **Ricochet Trap**, then the **Trap** finishes resolving and is put into the graveyard. When **Counterspell** resolves, it will see that its target (**Ricochet Trap**) is not legal any more, since it has changed zone, and will fizzle.



Resolving permanent spells

If the object that's resolving is a permanent spell, its resolution involves a single step: the spell card becomes a permanent and it's put onto the battlefield under the control of the spell's controller. A permanent spell is a spell with at least one of these types: creature, artifact, enchantment, planeswalker. Lands are permanents as well, but are never cast as spells.

There's an exception to this rule: **Aura spells** are permanent spells, but they have a target, even though the word "target" does not appear in their rules text - it's actually hidden in the definition of the enchant keyword. Aura spells resolve in two steps, exactly as instants and sorceries do. First the Aura spell checks if its target is still legal; if it is, it enters the battlefield attached to the object it was targeting, otherwise it doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack.

Sometimes, an Aura enters the battlefield without being cast. In this case, it's controller must choose an object that conforms to its enchant keyword, and the Aura will enter the battlefield attached to it. Note that this is *not* targeting, so you can choose permanents with shroud or hexproof; however, a permanent with a relevant **protection** can't be chosen this way, as the Aura can't be attached to it.

Example. As I cast **Dead Weight**, I must choose a target for it. As **Dead Weight** resolves, it will enter the battlefield attached to that creature. If my opponent responds giving that creature hexproof with **Ranger's Guile**, **Dead Weight** won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack and go straight from the stack to my graveyard.

Now I cast **Sun Titan** and choose the **Dead Weight** in my graveyard as the target of its triggered ability. Since I'm not casting **Dead Weight** as a spell, I don't need to choose a target. As the ability resolves, I'll pick a creature and return **Dead Weight** to the battlefield attached to it. I'm not targeting the creature, so I can choose one with hexproof (this was a very popular way to dispatch an opposing **Geist of Saint Traft**). However, I can't choose one with protection from black, such as a **White Knight**, because **Dead Weight** can't be attached to it.



Countering spells

Counter is a keyword action. To counter a spell or ability means to cancel it, removing it from the stack. It doesn't resolve and *none* of its effects occurs. A countered spell is put into its owner's graveyard. The player who cast a countered spell or ability doesn't get any "refund" of any costs that were paid.

Example. I cast a **Slice in Twain** targeting an enchantment. When my opponent gets priority he casts a **Cancel** targeting **Slice in Twain**. When **Cancel** resolves, **Slice in Twain** is removed from the stack and put into my graveyard. None of its effect occur: the target isn't destroyed and I don't draw a card. The four mana paid to cast **Slice in Twain** are not refunded.



Some spells or abilities cannot be countered by spells or abilities. It mean that spells or abilities that say "counter" don't affect those spells. However, uncounterable spells remain legal targets for counterspells. Remember that if an effect attempts to do something impossible, it does only as much as possible.

Example. **Abrupt Decay** can't be countered. A **Dissolve** that targets it won't remove it from the stack, but will do as much as possible: the **Dissolve**'s controller still scries 1 during the resolution. Similarly, if you cast a **Mana Drain** targeting a **Supreme Verdict**, you won't counter it, but at the beginning of your next main phase, the delayed triggered ability would still add 4 to your mana pool.



Note that uncounterable instants and sorceries say they can't be countered *by spells or abilities*, since if all of their target become illegal they **don't resolve** and **they're removed from the stack**.

Example. ***Smash** is made uncounterable by the ability of **Vexing Shusher**. If its target becomes illegal, **Smash** won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack: it won't destroy its target and its controller won't draw a card.*



Some counterspells have a self-replacement effect as part of their effect. Common examples are **Faerie Trickery**, **Remand**, **Dissipate**, **Lapse of Certainty**. Self-replacement effects are always applied before other replacement effects.

Example. ***Faerie Trickery** has a one-shot effect (countering a spell) and a replacement effect that modifies what this one-shot effect does (instead of moving the spell to the graveyard, it will move it to the exile zone). This is a classical example of a self-replacement effect.*

*Let's say we use a **Faerie Trickery** to counter a **Darksteel Colossus**. The Colossus replacement ability will try to replace the event of "Put it into a graveyard" with "Shuffle it into its owner's library". Normally, the Colossus controller would get to choose, and he could apply the Colossus' effect first, to avoid to have it exiled. However, since **Faerie Trickery** has a self-replacement effect, we always apply it first: since the **Darksteel Colossus** is now heading to the exile zone, its replacement ability can't apply any more.*



Example. ***Remand** has a self-replacement effect that modifies where the countered spell goes. If a player casts **Remand** targeting a **Linging Souls** played from the graveyard for its flashback cost, first we apply the self-replacement effect of **Remand** that instruct to return the card to its owner's hand; then we apply the replacement effect of flashback that instructs to exile the card instead of putting it anywhere else. **Linging Souls** will be exiled.*



Changing targets

Some spells or abilities change the target(s) of other spells or abilities. Common examples of cards that do this are: **Misdirection**, **Redirect**, **Deflection**.

The only thing these spells target is the spell that's going to be redirected. This means that you choose the spell to target as you announce the Redirect, but you will choose the new targets on resolution. The new target must be a legal target for the spell being redirected, and this is changed as the redirecting spell is resolving. If the target can't be changed to a legal target (perhaps because the original target is the only legal target available at this time), the original target is left unchanged.

Example. My opponent casts **Abrupt Decay** on my **Vedalken Shackles**, and I respond by casting **Redirect**. At this time, I don't have to say where I'm going to redirect the **Abrupt Decay**. When **Redirect** resolves, I will choose the new target for **Abrupt Decay**. If my opponent somehow gets rid of each other possible target after I cast **Redirect** but before it resolves, I won't be able to save my **Shackles**.



The word "you" in an object's text doesn't indicate a target, so it can't be changed.

Example. I cast **Lightning Helix** targeting a **Pain Seer** controlled by my opponent. In response he casts **Misdirection** targeting **Lightning Helix**. When **Misdirection** resolves, my opponent chooses a **Ghazbán Ogre** I control as the new target for **Lightning Helix**. This is the only change he can do; he can't change who will gain life, as that part of **Lightning Helix**'s effect is not targeted. When **Lightning Helix** resolves, 3 damage is dealt to the **Ogre** and I gain 3 life.



A spell can't target itself, ever.

Example. My opponent casts **Cryptic Command** to counter my **Earwig Squad** and draw a card, and I respond with **Ricochet Trap**. As Ricochet Trap is resolving, I can't change Cryptic Command's target to Cryptic Command itself. However, since Ricochet Trap is still a spell on the stack at this time (spells leave the stack as the very last step of their resolution), it's a legal target for Cryptic Command. As such, I can change Cryptic Command's target to Ricochet Trap, then the Trap finishes resolving and is put into the graveyard. When Cryptic Command resolves, it will see that its target (Ricochet Trap) is not legal any more, since it has changed zone, won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack. My opponent won't get to draw a card off his Command.



Note: Many players know that redirection spells can be used to win counter wars, but don't have a clear understanding of the way this happens. The role of the judge in this situation is to explain the rules and make sure that the cards are correctly played and resolved, but **not** to explain players how they should play their cards.

You can only change the target(s) of the spell. The spell's controller won't change, nor will any other already decision taken for it, such as mode, number of targets, additional costs, etc.

Example. I control **Geist of Saint Traft**, a creature with hexproof. I cast a **Lightning Bolt** targeting my opponent, and he responds with a **Deflection** on Lightning Bolt. As Deflection resolves, my opponent only chooses a new target for Lightning Bolt, but he doesn't gain control of it. Since the spell is still controlled by me, and Deflection only targets Lightning Bolt, he can choose Geist of Saint Traft as the new target.



Example. I control **Chandra, the Firebrand** and cast a **Lightning Bolt** targeting my opponent. In response he casts **Redirect** and chooses Chandra as the new target for Lightning Bolt. As Lightning Bolt resolves 3 loyal counters will be removed from Chandra.



One of the most common cards with the ability to change targets is **Spellskite**. Spellskite has an ability that changes the target of a spell or ability with Spellskite itself. The ability of Spellskite makes no mention of any restriction on how the target spell or ability should look like, so it can always target any object on the stack, even if it has no target or could not target Spellskite. When the ability resolves, the target will be changed only if Spellskite could be a legal target of that spell or ability. A good rule of thumb is: if the original caster could have cast the spell or activated the ability targeting Spellskite, then you can redirect it.

Example. *I control a **Spellskite**. My opponent casts an **Ordeal of Thassa** targeting one of his creature. As long as an **Aura** is a spell on the stack, it has a target, so I can change the target of the **Ordeal** with **Spellskite**. On the other hand, if an **Aura** enters the battlefield without being cast, for example because of **Sovereigns of Lost Alara**'s or **Sun Titan**'s ability, its controller will choose a creature to attach it to, but it's never a spell and it never targets, so **Spellskite** can't affect it.*



Example. *I control a **Sword of Feast and Famine** and an **Oona's Blackguard**. I activate the ability of the Equipment to attach it to the faerie. In response, my opponent targets the equip ability with **Spellskite**'s ability. This is a legal play, as **Spellskite** can target any object on the stack; however, since equip abilities of a source controlled by me can only target creatures I control, **Spellskite**'s ability will do nothing and the Equipment will go on the beautiful faerie, regardless of the ugly artifact.*



Note: Some spells and abilities can change the target of a spell "with a single target". These effects count each instance of the word "target" as a separate target, so for example a **Seeds of Strength** can't ever be targeted by **Misdirection**, not even if all three instances of the word target point towards the same creature. A **Spellskite**, on the other hand, can redirect all of the spell onto itself, but you need to activate it three times, since each activation allows you to change a single target.

Abilities and effects

Not everything that's able to affect a game has a physical representation. [Abilities](#) can be as powerful as spells, but they only live on the stack for a brief moment before disappearing; while they share many similarities with spells, they also have peculiarities and a strict (and important) categorization.

However, there's something even more impalpable than abilities. [Effects](#) are the [ghost of spells and abilities past](#), lingering results of objects that resolved. We'll learn to differentiate between an *ability* and its *effect*, and then explore the different types of effects and the minutiae and pitfalls each one possesses - since everything in the game is or has an effect, except perhaps vanilla creatures, this chapter is bigger than it appears. ^[1]

There's a class of effects that has a tendency to throw judges running in panic: Continuous effects. The [interactions](#) between them have historically been a focal point of judge testing, but, as we'll see, it's not a difficult topic if treated systematically and with a bit of - *nudge nudge wink wink* - **Humility**.

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1. ↑ As Commodore Guff [once said](#) in a tragicomic display of fourth-wall breakage, *I ought to know—I wrote it.*

Abilities

Magic is a game based upon abilities. Abilities define most of what a card can (and sometimes can't) do: every "portion" of the rules text on a card is an ability of that card. Such a "portion" can be either

- a single paragraph of text, isolated from other ones by a blank line; or
- a *keyword* (more properly, a *keyword ability*), separated from other keywords by blank lines or commas.

When you see a single word in the rules text, such as "flying", that's for sure a keyword ability. The purpose of keywords is to save space in the text box and in your mind. Every keyword ability has got its definition in .

Example. We can find three abilities on **Falkenrath Aristocrat**: "flying" and "haste" are keyword abilities, and are separated just by a comma; then, we have a blank line and a single paragraph of text, which is a whole single ability.

Notice that the full stop between "this turn" and "If" does not define a new ability, because it's in the middle of the same paragraph.



Abilities only work while the card is on the battlefield, unless specified or impossible otherwise.

Example. **Lumberknot** has hexproof, which matters on the battlefield only. Hexproof doesn't prevent Lumberknot from being countered while it's on the stack, neither to be removed from the graveyard by **Cremate**. Also, it can't get counters while it's not on the battlefield. That would be really weird!



Example. *Loxodon Smiter's* first ability states that it can't be countered. Since only spells on the stack can be countered, this ability only makes sense if it works while *Loxodon Smiter* is on the stack, so it does.

Champion of Stray Souls's second ability instructs us to regrow it "from your graveyard", so it can be activated only while it is in the graveyard - note that this is not true for the first ability, that only works from the battlefield, as normal.



However, abilities are not always "just there", like flying or **Lumberknot's** ones above. You often need to go through an extra effort to put them into use. For instance, you'll certainly know by now that, to exploit **Falkenrath Aristocrat's** third ability, you need to sacrifice a creature and your opponent will be able to respond, because you are using the stack. This leads to a second meaning of "ability", which is "an object on the stack generated by an ability on a card".

Note: Be careful! Even though they can be objects on the stack, **abilities are not spells**. A spell is associated with a whole card, while an ability is always a virtual object, generated by a portion of the rules text on a card. Things that specifically affect spells cannot affect abilities, and vice-versa.

Abilities can be split into four main categories:

- I. **Activated abilities** are those that allow you to pay a cost to put them into effect. They are written in the form **[Cost]: [Effect]**. The presence of the colon is your guarantee that you're dealing with an activated ability.

Example. *Fauna Shaman's* ability needs its cost to be paid in order to benefit from its ability. Notice the presence of the colon. *Falkenrath Aristocrat's* third ability we were discussing above is an activated ability, too.



It's worth mentioning that **planeswalkers** loyalty abilities are activated abilities, even though no colon is visible on the card.

2. **Triggered abilities** are those that have a trigger condition and an effect. They are written in the form **[Trigger condition], [Effect]**, and the trigger condition always begins with the words "**when**", "**whenever**", "**at the beginning of** (some phase or step)", or "**at end of** (some phase or step)". These

also use the stack, but they do so automatically when the trigger condition is met. You can have partial control of them, as long as you are able to cause their trigger condition to occur.

Example. ***Bloodgift Demon** is not going to ask for your permission to use its ability: it will inevitably go on the stack just after you untap. You can choose who it's going to affect, at least...*

***Blood Artist** needs a creature to die for its ability to work. You'll have to wait for combat or removal to trigger it, unless you have **Falkenrath Aristocrat** around!*



The way triggered abilities work is intimately linked with the concept of **priority**, so they'll be discussed in the section **The game in slow motion**.

3. **Static abilities** are those written as statements. They are simply true. These abilities affect the game as long as the permanent they're printed on remains on the battlefield and has the ability.

Example. ***Tempered Steel**'s ability grants +2/+2 to its controller's artifact creatures. The effect lasts until the enchantment remains on the battlefield.*



4. **Spell abilities** is just a name for all the instructions on instant and sorcery cards which don't fit any of the categories above, so they are never independent objects on the stack. They simply represent the resolving spell's effect.

Example. When you start resolving **Ponder** you have to follow the instructions given by the spell's ability.

Resounding Thunder has an activated ability (cycling) and a triggered ability that triggers when the card is cycled. The rest of the text ("Resounding Thunder deals 3 damage to target creature or player.") is a spell ability.



We'll also talk about **mana abilities**, that we can loosely define as all abilities add mana to a player's mana pool as part of their effect, have special rules: they do not use the stack and in some cases can be activated even when it wouldn't be possible for "regular" abilities.

Example. All basic lands have the intrinsic mana ability "Add [colored mana]". **Avacyn's Pilgrim**'s activated ability is also a mana ability.



As a final remark, let's notice that abilities can come from an object's text or be granted to an object by an effect. The game does not distinguish between these two.

Example. **Serra Angel** has flying because this ability is printed on it, whereas **Zephyr Charge** and **Trained Condor** can grant this ability to creatures. Regardless of the way a creature has learned to fly, **Grounded** will strip it of the ability.



Activated abilities

Activated abilities have a cost and an effect. They are always written as "**[Cost]:[Effect].[Activation restriction (if any)]**".

Any time a player has priority, he may activate such an ability.

Example. The activated ability of **Tectonic Edge** is written as: "**1, ♣, Sacrifice Tectonic Edge: Destroy target nonbasic land. Activate this ability only if an opponent controls four or more lands.**" Following the template above, we have:

- A cost: pay 1, tap Tectonic Edge and sacrifice it.
- An effect: destroy target nonbasic land.
- An activation restriction: the opponent must control four lands at the time the ability is activated.



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Activating an ability

To activate an ability means to put it onto the stack and to pay its costs. Activating an ability basically follows the same steps for [casting a spell](#), that are summarized below for your convenience:

1. Announce that you are activating the ability.
2. If the ability is modal, announce the mode you choose; if the ability has a variable cost (such as an {X} in its mana cost or some number of creatures to sacrifice), announce the value of that variable.
3. Announces the targets required by the ability. The same target can't be chosen multiple times for any one instance of the word "target" on the ability.
4. If the ability requires you to divide or distribute an effect (for example damage or counters) among one or more targets, announce the division. Each of these targets must receive at least one of whatever is being divided.
5. Determine the total cost of the ability, taking into account effects that increase or reduce the cost, such as **Brutal Suppression** or **Training Grounds**.
6. If the total cost includes a mana payment, you now have a chance to activate mana abilities.
7. Pay the total cost in any order.

A permanent may have several activated abilities, independent from one another. The number of activations you can get is usually limited by the required resources only.

Example. *The first activated ability of Shipwreck Singer requires a target, it means that you must have a legal target to activate it and when the ability will resolve that target must still be legal. If it isn't the ability doesn't resolve and it's removed from the stack. If you have available mana you can activate it more than once.*

The second ability does not require a target, but it requires the ⚡ for being activated, and obviously you can't tap a permanent that is already tapped.



Example. *Shiv's Embrace is an aura that has an activated ability requiring ⚡ for being activated. You can activate the ability multiple times by paying its cost that many times, in this way you can give to the enchanted creature multiple instances of the same effect. Each of them creates a single effect that is independent from the others.*



Keyword activated abilities

Most abilities describe exactly what they do in the card rules text. Some however are very common or would require too much space to be explained on the card. In these cases, we find on the card only the name of the ability as a "keyword". Sometimes reminder text summarizes the game rule, and this is where you will find the colon that shows that you're dealing with an activated ability.

Some example of keyword activated abilities are: equip, cycling, unearth, scavenge, monstrosity. You can find the whole list in paragraph 702 of the Comprehensive Rules.

Example. Equip is an activated ability of Equipment cards. "Equip [cost]" means "[Cost]: Attach this permanent to target creature you control. Activate this ability only any time you could cast a sorcery."



Example. Monstrosity is a keyword activated ability. Since it only requires a mana expenditure, you can activate it more than once, but when it resolves, it checks if the creature is already monstrous. If it isn't, the ability puts that number of +1/+1 counter on the creature and marks it as monstrous. This means that further activations will have no effect. If a monstrosity ability is somehow countered, the creature does not get counters neither becomes monstrous and monstrosity can be used again. Many creatures with a monstrosity ability also have a triggered ability that triggers when the creature becomes monstrous (in other words, when its monstrosity ability resolves for the first time). If the monster is killed in response to the monstrosity activation, it will never become monstrous, so the triggered ability will never trigger.



Activated abilities may usually be activated only from the battlefield, unless it doesn't make sense otherwise.

Example. Scavenge is an activated ability that works only while the card with scavenge is in a graveyard. "Scavenge [cost]" means "[Cost], Exile this card from your graveyard: Put a number of +1/+1 counters equal to the power of the card you exiled on target creature. Activate this ability only any time you could cast a sorcery." Since part of the cost is exiling the card from the graveyard, it must be there in order to activate the ability.



Loyalty abilities

Loyalty abilities are peculiar activated abilities only found on planeswalker cards. Their cost is represented by a number that indicates how many loyalty counters to add or to remove in order to activate the ability. Since adding or removing counters is a cost, it cannot be responded to.

Loyalty abilities follow special rules: a player may activate a loyalty ability of a permanent he controls only during a main phase of his turn while the stack is empty, and only once for each planeswalker.

Example. *Jace, the Mind Sculptor* has four loyalty abilities. The first one requires to add two loyalty counters. The third and the fourth one require to remove them. The second ability does not change the number of counters and just requires you to acknowledge its activation.

Once Jace has entered the battlefield you may activate immediately one of his loyalty abilities, because you receive priority after a spell resolves on your turn. Changing the number of counters on it is the activation cost. A player cannot respond before the number of counter is changed, but can do so afterwards, before the ability resolves.



Non-activated abilities with a mana cost

Not every ability that requires a payment is activated. In order to be sure that the ability you are looking at is activated, there must be a colon (':') somewhere. Typical abilities that can be confused for activated abilities are **triggered abilities** that ask for a payment on resolution. Things can get complicated if any of these abilities is keyworded. When in doubt, refer to the definitions in the Comprehensive Rules.

Example. *Teleportal* has the ability "overload", which is a keyworded alternative cost. Alternative costs are usually phrased, "You may [pay some cost] rather than pay [this object's] mana cost", or "You may cast [this object] without paying its mana cost". Activated abilities are written as "[Cost]: [Effect.] [Activation instructions (if any).]" instead. An alternative cost is a static ability, never an activated ability.




Example. *Extort* is a triggered ability that could be mistaken for an activated ability, because it requires a payment to get its effect. It reads: "Whenever you cast a spell, you may pay 1. If you do, each opponent loses 1 life and you gain that much life."

It means that this ability will trigger every time you cast a spell while *Blind Obedience* is on the battlefield and, when the ability will resolve, you may choose either to pay 1 to get its effect, or simply to do nothing. Since each instance of such an ability asks for a single payment, you can't pay 1 more than once for a single trigger.

A triggered ability that asks you to pay a cost to get (part of) its effect is not an activated ability. It's still a triggered ability and the choice to pay is made on resolution.



Example. ***Frenzied Goblin** has a triggered ability that targets a creature. You will not pay  until the ability is resolving. If the creature becomes an illegal target before that time, the ability won't resolve, it'll be removed from the stack and you won't have to pay - actually, you won't even have the chance to pay.*



Static abilities

Static abilities, as opposed to activated or triggered abilities, are constantly affecting the game. They are usually written as statements and are often represented by a keyword. You don't really *use* a static ability: they don't use the stack, as their effect is continuously applied and checked throughout the game. Most of them only work while the card it's written on is on the battlefield, but there can be exceptions to this.

You can recognize a static ability because it's neither activated (so there is no colon) nor triggered (so it doesn't begin with "When", "Whenever" or "At"), and it's not part of the instructions you follow when an instant or sorcery resolves. Static abilities affect the casting of a spell, the characteristics of one or more objects, or the rules of the game itself.

Example. *Convoke* is a common example of a static ability that affects the spell only while it's on the stack, as such it is part of the first category. "Put three 1/1 white Spirit creature tokens with flying onto the battlefield." is the effect the sorcery has when it resolves, so it's not a static ability, it's a spell ability.



Example. *Glorious Anthem* is part of the second category, as it modifies the characteristics of permanents you control. It has no effect while on the stack, in your hand or in the graveyard, and starts affecting your creatures as soon as it's on the battlefield.



Example. *Exploration* is part of the third category: it modifies the rules of the game as long as it's on the battlefield, allowing you to do something you usually wouldn't be able to.



Some static abilities establish **restrictions or requirements**, that is effects that say a creature can't attack/block or that say a creature must attack/block, respectively.^[1]

Example. *Goblin Raider* has a clear statement written on it that affects the card while on the battlefield, setting a restriction about the creature's combat phase: it can't be declared as a blocker.

Goblin Brigand falls into the second category, as its ability requires it to be declared as attacker in every combat phase.



Static abilities can also grant other abilities to permanents you control.

Example. These abilities can be easily recognized because they affect all of the stated permanents (creatures you control, in this case) and their effect only works as long as they are on the battlefield.



Some permanents may have a static ability that sets, increases, or reduces the mana cost of other spells.

Example. *All of these are common and easy to spot once you've got the hang of it, as they all modify the cost of spells while they're on the stack, not anywhere else.*



Despite being tricky to recognize, you might have seen or heard of enchantments, specifically Auras, that have static abilities that grant abilities to the permanents they enchant.

Example. *Underworld Connections grants an ability to the land it enchants. Splinter Twin grants an ability to the creature it enchants. Neither has an activated ability itself, so naming one of these Auras with **Pithing Needle** is legal but completely pointless.*



Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



Static abilities that don't work on the battlefield

So far we have only seen static abilities that affect permanents on the battlefield. However, static abilities can do much more: they can change the cost of the spells you cast, make them uncounterable, or work while their source is not on the battlefield.

Example. ***Riftstone Portal**'s static ability will only work as long as it is in your graveyard, and will stop working at any other time!*



Example. ***Slaughter Games** and **Supreme Verdict** both have a static ability that works while they're on the stack, and makes them impossible to counter. The only difference between these two cards lies in the possibility for the former (and any targeted uncounterable spell) to do not resolve and be removed from the stack, in case they only have illegal targets on resolution.*



Example. *In the first case, the ability affects spells only while they're on the stack, and only if the **Fist of Suns** is on the battlefield. In the second case, **Fling**'s ability sets an additional cost only while it's being cast.*



Characteristic-defining abilities

Some static abilities give us information about characteristics of the object they're printed on, such as its color, its type or its power and toughness: those are called **characteristic-defining abilities** and they function in every zone, even outside the game.

However, not all abilities that define some characteristic are fall in this group. A static ability is a characteristic-defining ability if it meets the following criteria:

- It defines an object's colors, subtypes, power, or toughness.
- It is *intrinsic*, i.e. printed on the card it affects.
- It is not an ability that an object grants to itself.
- It is not conditional, i.e. does not set the values of such characteristics only if certain conditions are met.

Example. ***Mistform Ultimus** has an intrinsic static ability that defines its creature type, and **Maro** has one that defines its power and toughness. Both of these abilities work in every zone.*



Some static abilities may create **replacement effects** or **prevention effects**, we'll talk about these later in this section. Other static abilities might generate an effect that allows a player to take a **special action** to ignore the effect from that ability.

Example. ***Leonin Arbiter**'s static ability surely can be a tricky one! Let's take a closer look:*

- *If he's shown the **Path to Exile** or as fodder for a **Birthing Pod** activation, he'll be long gone from the battlefield when you're instructed to search your library, so his effect will have already ended.*
- *If there are two Leonin Arbiters on the battlefield, each Arbiter requires its own toll to be paid, as there will be two static abilities, one from each Arbiter.*
- *If Leonin Arbiter is blinked by a **Restoration Angel** or **Cloudshift** after you have paid the cost to ignore his ability, you will have to pay that cost again, since the "new" Leonin Arbiter does not have any memory of its past existence.*



- I. ↑ Note that evasive abilities, such as flying or shadow, also create restrictions.

Mana abilities

To cast a spell, a player has to follow a well established sequence of actions that starts with putting the spell on the stack and ends with the payment of the spell's mana cost. While executing each and every action needed to cast a spell, nothing can be done; priority isn't passed and there is no chance of casting instants or activating abilities, with one and only exception: **mana abilities**.


The reason why a player casting a spell can activate a mana ability is because mana abilities don't use the stack. With the mana generated by mana abilities, then the player can pay the spell's cost. Mana abilities can be either activated or triggered; both varieties resolve immediately after they're activated or triggered, without using the stack.

Activated mana abilities

An activated ability is a mana ability if it meets these three criteria:

- It adds mana a player's mana pool.
- It doesn't target.
- It's not a loyalty ability.

Keep in mind that abilities such as "untap target land" are *not* mana abilities. If you want to use them to cast your spell, you'll have to activate them ahead of time and *float the mana* (the jargon used to say "add mana to the pool to keep it for future use").

Example. *Blood Pet* and *Llanowar Elves* are both examples of mana abilities. Basic lands have the intrinsic ability ": Add [colored mana].", which is, of course, a mana ability. Most non-basic lands also have a mana ability that allows to tap them for mana.



Example. *Arbor Elf*'s ability has a target, and doesn't actually add any mana into your mana pool. *Koth of the Hammer* is a planeswalker, so its loyalty ability can only be activated at sorcery speed, not during the casting of a spell, and uses the stack as normal.

These are both example of abilities that help you generating mana, but are not mana abilities.



Example. *Lion's Eye Diamond* has a mana ability. However, it also explicitly states that it can only be activated "whenever you could cast an instant." Because of this, you won't be able to activate its ability while you are casting a spell. You'll have to activate it and discard your hand before you can use the mana - the whole point of its design is that you can never ever use this mana to cast a spell from your hand. However, it's still a mana ability, so it doesn't use the stack.


On the other hand, *Deathrite Shaman*'s first ability is an activated ability that is not a mana ability because, to be able to add a mana to the mana pool, it targets a land in any graveyard.



Example. *Valleymaker* is an example of activated mana ability too. The wording here is very careful. *Valleymaker* doesn't target a player: although targeting requires a choice, "choosing" is not the same as "targeting". So it fulfills the first basic requirement, then we see that it's not a planeswalker ability and that adds mana to the mana pool. This is the reason why it's a mana ability.



Some mana abilities also have other effects, such as dealing damage to their controller or making him draw a card. These are still mana abilities, and their full effect happens without using the stack

Example. Let's say we are both at 1 and I have a **Lightning Bolt** in my hand, but the only untapped land I control is a **Shivan Reef**. If I cast my Bolt and tap the Shivan Reef for , it will immediately deal 1 damage to me, causing me to lose the game before the Lightning Bolt can resolve.

On the other hand, if I had a **City of Brass**, I could tap it for mana and put its triggered ability (that's completely independent from its the mana ability) onto the stack. Since the mana ability resolves outright, I can respond to the triggered by casting Lightning Bolt, killing you before the City of Brass can kill me.



Triggered mana abilities

A triggered ability is a mana ability if it meets these three criteria:

- It adds mana a player's mana pool.
- It triggers from the resolution of an activated mana ability or from mana being added to a player's mana pool.
- It doesn't target.

Triggered mana abilities don't use the stack, and if they trigger during the announcement of a spell you'll receive the mana immediately and you'll be able to use that mana to pay for your spell.

Example. **Dictate of Karametra** and **Fertile Ground** are both examples of triggered mana abilities. Activating a mana ability causes them to trigger. Since they are mana abilities, the triggers won't use the stack and the mana will be added to the player's mana pool immediately.



Example. ***Mana Flare**'s ability adds mana to a player's mana pool and is triggered by activating a mana ability, so it's a triggered mana ability. The same is true for **Overabundance**, but along with the extra mana produced by the triggered ability, the player will also suffer 1 damage. Since they are both part of a single mana ability, neither of those actions can be targeted or countered.*



Example. *All that glitters is not gold! For example, **Lotus Cobra**'s triggered ability seems to be a triggered mana ability but it's not! To be a triggered mana ability, Lotus Cobra's trigger should be originated by activating a mana ability; unfortunately playing a land isn't a mana ability, so feel free to **Stifle** it.*



A spell can never be a mana ability. Since the early days of **Magic: the Gathering**, we have had spells that granted us some spare mana, like **Dark Ritual** or, more recently, **Manamorphose**.

Although those spells add mana to the player's mana pool (first mana ability prerequisite), aren't targeted (second mana ability prerequisite) and are not a planeswalker's ability (third mana ability prerequisite), they cannot be classified as mana abilities.

These are *spell abilities* that add mana to the pool. In other words, these are just spells cast and resolved as any other spell; they can be countered (unless stated otherwise) and responded to before any extra mana is generated.^[1]

Example. ***Cabal Ritual** and **Desperate Ritual** both add mana to the player's mana pool, aren't targeted and aren't a planeswalker's loyalty ability; they aren't, anyway, mana abilities and anybody could stop them with a **Counterspell**.*



- i. ↑ In the very ancient past some of these spells were printed with the type "[Mana Source](#)". Those spells have received an updated oracle text that identifies them as instants.

Effects

When abilities and spells resolve, we carry out the instruction they give in the order they're written; as long as a static abilities applies, something is stated to be true. Everything that happens because of spells or abilities is an **effect**; the spell or ability that generates an effect is the **source** of that effect.

Effects should not be mixed with abilities.^[1] They are very different game concepts. *Abilities* can refer to either of the following:

- Any text printed on a card or granted to it
- The pseudo-spell object that we put onto the stack when an ability is activated or triggers

Effects, on the other hand, are the things that happen or change because of spells and abilities, such as damage being dealt, stuff to be destroyed, increases or decreases to a creature's power and toughness, restrictions on what can block a given creature, and so on.

Example. *Prodigal Sorcerer* has an activated ability: it's the text printed on it that says "☞: Prodigal Sorcerer deals 1 damage to target creature or player."

When we activate the Sorcerer's ability, we put on the stack an object that's not exactly a spell, but closely resembles one. It used to be called a "pseudo-spell" by older versions of the rules, but now we simply call it ability, albeit in a different sense that we call the text on the creature an ability.

When this object on the stack resolves, it generates an effect. In this case, its effect is that it causes a permanent on the battlefield (the Prodigal Sorcerer) to reach out and poke the target for a point of damage.



An important rule that's common to all kind of effects is that if an effect tries to do impossible things or can't complete what it's trying to do, it will perform all the possible actions and as much as possible of the incomplete ones.

Example. *I play Sleep targeting my opponent, who controls both tapped and untapped creatures. Its effect tries to tap them all, but since some of them are already tapped, this action is partially impossible. The effect shrugs, and does as much as it can: it taps untapped creatures, and ignores the rest. Then the other half of the spell kicks in, and "locks down" all creatures - since there's no correlation with the way they were tapped and the creatures that were already tapped can be locked down just fine, it does.*



Example. A player activates **Goblin Charbelcher**, but no lands are left in his libraries. The effect will start doing things, reveal all cards left in the library, and then will see it's unable to complete the action. Since it can't keep going until a land is revealed, it goes on to deal the damage and then instructs the player to stack its library.



Note that this is different from a spell **fizzling** because all of its target are illegal. If the spell has no target, or at least one of its target is still legal, it *will* resolve, but won't be able to touch illegal targets.

Example. I cast **Electrolyze**, choosing to deal one damage to my opponent and one damage to his **Mother of Runes**, and in response he activates Mother of Runes to have it give protection from red to itself. As Electrolyze resolves, it will not do anything to the now-illegal Mom, but since it still has a legal target (my opponent), will deal 1 damage to him and I will draw a card.

On the hand, if I choose to deal 2 damage to **Mangara of Corondor** and my opponents bounces it with **Karakas**, Electrolyze won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack because all of its target (in this case, the lone Mangara) are now illegal. I don't get to draw a card.



Effects can be divided in three categories, and it's very important to be able to correctly assign effects to the appropriate category, since each one follows its own rules.

An effect will always belong to one (and *only one*) of the following groups:

- One-shot effects
- Continuous effects
- Replacement effects

In the next pages we'll discuss each of these categories separately.

1. ↑ This happens partly because older cards used the term *fast effect* to collectively indicate abilities, instants and interrupts.

One-shot effects

One-shot effects perform some action and are done; for example, they could cause damage to be dealt, permanents to be destroyed, move cards from one zone to another, or create tokens. One-shot effects are only generated by resolving spells and abilities; static abilities always result in [continuous](#) or [replacement effects](#).

Example. ***Lightning Bolt** generates a one-shot effect as it resolves; in this case, it causes the card on the stack to deal some damage. Other examples of one-shot effects are **Llanowar Elves**, **Terror**, **Unsummon**, **Nekraatal**, **Dragon Blood**, **Young Pyromancer**.*



However, one-shot effects can sometimes affect the game at later times. They do so by creating [delayed triggered abilities](#) that will go off at the appropriate time.

Continuous effects

Continuous effects can be generated by either **static abilities** of permanents on the battlefield, or by **spells and abilities** as they resolve. Once they start applying, the source of an effect is irrelevant: we handle them all in the same way. However, there's a subtle difference between these two types of effects: the rules to identify the set of objects they apply to are different.

Effects from static abilities

Continuous effects from static abilities *continuously re-evaluate* their impact on the game. In other words, the set of objects they apply to and what they do to them is never "set in stone", and can be modified by play actions.

Example. I control **Glorious Anthem** and animate my **Treetop Village**. The enchantment will see that a new creature has appeared on my side of the board, and start applying to it: the Treetop Village will go straight from being a land to being a 4/4 land creature. It's never 3/3. If I lose control of it because my opponent steals it with **Dominare**, Glorious Anthem immediately stops boosting it: my opponent will receive a 3/3 creature, and will never control a 4/4, not even for a split second.

If I cast a creature with Glorious Anthem into the battlefield, it will enter the battlefield already boosted. For example, if I cast a **Giant Spider** with a **Garruk's Packleader** and a Glorious Anthem on the battlefield, I'll get to draw a card.



These effects begin as soon as their source enters the battlefield. There's no moment, however brief, then their source is into the battlefield but they're still "off". In the same fashion, these effects immediately expire if the permanent they come from leaves the battlefield.

Example. If I name red for **Voice of All**, there's no window for my opponent to **Shock** it.



Effects from resolving spells and abilities

Very often, these effect will have a well specified duration. In this case, they always say that something is true **for as long as** a condition is met. In case this duration never starts, or ends before the effect begins, the effect does nothing. It doesn't start and immediately stop again, and it doesn't last forever. In case no duration is specified, the effect will last for the remainder of the game. ,

Example. If you cast **Sower of Temptation** targeting your opponent's creature, and respond to its triggered ability casting an **Unsummon** on the Faerie, the ability will resolve but won't have any effect. It will not switch control at all, so the targeted creature won't even be affected by "summoning sickness" again.

Dominate doesn't specify a duration a duration, which means I'll get to keep the creature until it dies or it's stolen back from me with another spell.



The behavior of these effects change depending on what they do. If they alter the rules of the game, they'll work in the same way as effects from static abilities: they "circle around" and look for stuff to affect according to their text. If they modify characteristics or control of objects, on the other hand, they will enumerate the objects they affect and compute what they do to them *only at the time they resolve*, and then stick to this for their duration.

Example. If I resolve **Glorious Charge** (that interestingly has the exact same text as **Glorious Anthem**, except it's an instant rather than an enchantment) and later animate a **Treetop Village**, the land creature will not be affected, since was not part of the set of object Glorious Charge looked for at the time it resolved. On the other hand, if I animate it, cast Glorious Charge to pump it, and my opponent steals it with **Dominate**, it will keep the bonus, since the pump effect is locked unto it.

Let's say I cast **Inner Calm**, **Outer Strength** targeting my **Gnarled Mass**. As it resolves, I count the cards in my hand: they are three, so the Spirit will get +3/+3. If I later cast more spells or draw a bunch of cards, the bonus granted to my creature will not change.



Example. Consider the card **Teleportal**. Even though its text is only a single sentence, it actually has two separate effects: it gives its target +1/0, and it states that it can't be blocked. If I play it for its overload cost, and then animate an **Izzet Keyrune**, it doesn't get +1/0, since it was not a creature when the effect first calculated the set of creatures it would apply to. However, it can't be blocked, because this effect is not changing its characteristics (it doesn't say "Creatures you control gain "This creature can't be blocked.""), it's changing the rules of the game.



Here's a table that sums up what we have discussed so far:

Effects	from a static ability of a permanent	from a resolving spell or ability
that modify characteristics or control	constantly re-evaluate what they do to what	evaluate their effect only as they resolve
that alter the rules of the game	constantly re-evaluate what they do to what	constantly re-evaluate what they do to what

Interaction of continuous effects

Continuous affects are aplenty in **Magic**, and since they have a duration, they often interact with one another. Since the final result can be very difficult and ambiguous to evaluate, a comprehensive framework exist to handle such interactions. Given the preminence it has, it was split into [its own section](#).

Replacement effects

Replacement effects are continuous effects, but they're so peculiar they're better treated as their own kind. They act as "sentries" and watch for a particular event to happen. Then they "intercept" that particular event and cause something else to happen in its stead. It's easy to recognize a replacement effect: they always use the words **instead** or **skip**. (Well, *almost* always: see [below](#)). ,

Note: *Don't mistake replacement effect with triggered abilities! Triggered abilities let the trigger event happen, and then do something; replacement effects stop the event and substitute it with another event - or sometimes with nothing at all.*

Example. ***Darksteel Colossus** has the iconic replacement effect. Let's say its controller is forced to sacrifice it: the resulting event would be to put it into his or her graveyard. However, its replacement effect will change this event, and shuffle it into the library. The Colossus never touches the graveyard: if **Fecundity** is into the battlefield, it will not trigger.*



Replacement effects can be generated by either static abilities or resolving objects. If they're generated by spells, activated abilities or triggered abilities, they only replace the event *the next time* it happens, and then disappear. If they're generated by static abilities, they are active as long as the static ability that generates them exists.

Example. *If I control a **Words of Wind** and activate its ability, it generates a replacement effect that will only apply to the first time the event "I draw a card" happens in the turn. I can activate it more than once to replace more card draws. On the other hand, if I control **Thought Reflection**, its replacement effect will apply to all card draws, since it's generated by a static ability.*



Interaction of replacement effects

Sometimes, two or more replacement effects will try to modify the same event. In this case, the affected player or the controller of the affected object will choose the order in which these effects will be applied. Since the

event will change each time one of the effects is applied, the other effects may become inappropriate and we don't apply them any more, or effects initially unrelated will be involved.

In any case, each effect will only apply just once to a given event.

Example. ***Fire Servant** generates a replacement effect that modifies how red spells I control deal damage. As soon as it sees that such a spell is going to deal damage, it steps in and doubles the damage. In case I control two Fire Servants as I'm resolving a **Lightning Bolt**, both will try to replace the event.*

The player that is being damaged or the controller of the creature that is being damaged is the one that decides which effect is applied before, even though in this case it's irrelevant, since they are identical. The first effect will replace the event "Lightning Bolt deals 3 damage" with "Lightning Bolt deals 6 damage". Now we have to check if the other effect is still applicable: since the event is still a red spell dealing damage, it is, so the event becomes "Lightning Bolt deals 12 damage". Since the first effect has already been used up, it doesn't try to replace the event any further.



Example. *Now let's say I cast a **Lightning Bolt** targeting my opponent as I control a **Fire Servant** and he controls a **Benevolent Unicorn**. He can choose the order in which effects are applied; if he chooses to apply Benevolent Unicorn first, the event will become "Lightning Bolt deals 2 damage", which Fire Servant will turn into "Lightning Bolt deals 4 damage"; if he goes the other way around, Fire Servant will cause the Bolt to deal 6 damage, which Benevolent Unicorn will reduce to 5.*



Example. I control **Furnace of Rath**, **Words of War** and **Thought Reflection**, and I activate Words of War once during my upkeep, which sets up a "single-use" replacement effect. I'm about to draw a card for my turn, so I have to choose which one of the available replacement effects I want to use first.

If I choose to turn my draw into damage, Thought Reflection will not be applicable to it any more.

So, I'd probably choose to apply Thought Reflection first. This will turn the event "Draw a card" into "Draw 2 cards". Then the effect from Words of War will turn it into "Draw a card and deal 2 damage". Furnace of Rath will see that the effect now involves damage, and step in to modify it into "Draw a card and deal 4 damage".



There's a special kind of replacement effects that mess with this rule: **self-replacement effects**. A self-replacement effect is not a a continuous effect, but the effect of a spell or ability that modifies what the rest of the spell/ability itself does. Self-replacement effects are *always* applied before other replacement effects. ,

Example. **Dissipate** has a one-shot effect (countering a spell) and a replacement effect that modifies what this one-shot effect does (instead of moving the spell to the graveyard, it will move it to the exile zone). This is a classical example of a self-replacement effect.

Let's say we use a Dissipate to counter a **Darksteel Colossus**. The Colossus replacement ability will try to replace the event of "Put it into a graveyard" with "Shuffle it into its owner's library". Normally, the Colossus controller would get to choose, and he could apply the Colossus' effect first, to avoid to have it exiled. However, since Dissipate has a self-replacement effect, we always apply it first: since the Darksteel Colossus is now heading to the exile zone, its replacement ability can't apply any more.



Note: **Planeswalkers** used to have an intrinsic replacement effect, that allowed us to burn opponents and then have the damage dealt to a planeswalker they control instead. This rule was removed with the release of Dominaria, and many spells and abilities (but not all the ones that could damage planeswalker before) were reworded so they can directly target planeswalkers. Make sure to look at the official Oracle text to determine whether a card released before Dominaria can target a planeswalker or not.

Other rules

Replacement effects must exist at the time the event would take place: if something happens, it's too late to replace it. This means that you might have to create replacement effects *expecting* that something you want to replace will happen. In case the event you were expecting doesn't happen the effect simply does nothing.

Example. My opponent casts **Lightning Bolt** targeting my **Gnarled Mass**. Since I expect the Bolt will deal damage to my creature, I protect it with **Healing Salve**. My opponent casts **Misdirection** on his **Lightning Bolt**, choosing me as the new target. When the Bolt resolves, I happily take 3 damage, and the effect from **Healing Salve** does nothing at all, except expiring at end of turn.



An event that's replaced by something else or skipped never happens, which means no triggered abilities can trigger off of it. Only the new event will be taken into account to check if something triggers. Similarly, if damage is reduced to 0 while applying replacement effects, it's not dealt at all: other replacement effects that replace damage will not apply to it.

Example. I activate **Words of Wind** during my upkeep to replace the "I draw a card" event that happens during my draw step. My **Jace's Erasure** will not trigger, as I didn't actually draw a card.



Example. I control **Sulfuric Vapors** and cast **Lightning Bolt** targeting my opponent. He responds shielding himself with a **Healing Salve**. When **Lightning Bolt** resolves, he will choose to apply **Healing Salve** before. Since this will reduce the damage dealt to 0, there is no damage dealing at all any more, so **Sulfuric Vapors** can't apply. My opponent takes no damage.



Some effects offer you or the opponent the choice to do something, and then do something based on your choice. In case your action of choice gets replaced with something else, the original effect doesn't care, it just notes what you *choose*, not what actually happens. However, I can never choose to do something that would be impossible, even if it ends up being replaced.

Example. ***Riddlesmith's** triggered ability asks you if you want to draw a card and, in case you do, causes you to discard a card. If you choose to draw and replace the draw with something else (for example with **Words of War**), Riddlesmith will force you to discard anyway.*

*However, if a **Spirit of the Labyrinth** is currently forbidding me to draw cards, I can't choose to draw for Riddlesmith's ability, even if I know the draw would be replaced by Words of War, as I can't even try to choose an impossible action.*

*In the same vein, if you play **Browbeat** and your opponent prevents the damage it would deal (for example, he activates a **Circle of Protection: Red** in response), he can still choose to be dealt damage, and you will not draw: even though the damage wasn't actually dealt, he took the choice.*



There's an exception to this: if an effect replaces card draws, it will apply even if the library of the affected player is empty. This will not cause players to lose the game.

Example. *If I control **Words of Wind** and you mill me out with a massive **Brain Freeze**, I can still activate Word of Wind during my upkeep and replace the card draw that would knock me out with the bounce effect.*



Special replacement effects

Some replacement effects don't use the instead/skip template. These are still replacement effects, so they follow the general rules we have seen so far, but also have some more strings attached.

1. **Prevention effects** always use the word **prevent**
2. **Redirection effects** always use the words **is dealt to something else instead**
3. **Regeneration effects** always use the word **regenerate**
4. Effects that modify how permanents **enter the battlefield**, are replacement effects as well

In the following pages, we'll look in detail at each of these categories of effects.

Prevention effects

Prevention effects are a special kind of **replacement effects**, so all the rules that apply to replacement effects apply to prevention effects as well. Prevention effects (and only them) always use the word **prevent**.

Prevention effects work as shields attached to creatures or players, that absorb part of the damage they would receive. If they're generated by spells, activated abilities or triggered abilities, there's always a duration associated to them, and usually an amount of damage they will prevent: each time a point of damage is prevented, one shield is used up. When all shields are used up, the effect expires. If they come from static abilities, on the other hand, they are active as long as the ability that generates them exists, and keep preventing damage.

If all damage that would be dealt by a source is prevented, the source does not deal damage at all, so no abilities that trigger off damage from that source will spring.

Example. ***Fog** causes all combat damage to be prevented: the effect here has limitations on duration (the current turn) and type of damage (only combat damage), but not on the amount.*

***Dolmen Gate** has a static ability that prevents damage. In this case, there is no time limit: if a creature is attacking, combat damage dealt to it will be stopped.*

***Healing Salve** sets up a limited amount of shields: if a source would deal more than 3 damage, only part of it will be prevented. However, if the protected player is being dealt damage from several sources at the same time, he can decide which damage will be prevented. For example, if **Scroll Thief** and a 3/3 creature are attacking, he can choose to prevent 2 damage from the 3/3 creature and 1 from the Scroll Thief, in order to keep his opponent from drawing a card.*



Prevention is not optional: if a shield can be used, it must be. However, in case more than one prevention effect is available, the player or the controller of the creature that would take damage can choose which one to use up first.

Example. *Phage the Untouchable* is attacking me, so I'm **very** motivated to prevent its damage. I cast **Orim's Cure** targeting myself. After it resolves, my opponent casts **Lightning Bolt** targeting me. Even though I'd rather take 3 damage from the Bolt and save all the shields for Phage's damage, I can't: damage from the Bolt is prevented, and I'm left with very little time to find a solution to the impending Phage's touch.

However, let's suppose I control a **Burrenton Forge-Tender**. I sacrifice it, choosing to prevent the damage from **Lightning Bolt**: now, when the Bolt resolves, I will have two prevention effects trying to apply to it. Since I'm the player being damaged, I'll choose to apply the effect from **Burrenton Forge-Tender** before, so that **Orim's Cure** is left with nothing to apply to, and can be used to stop Phage's damage (and triggered ability!).



Some effects specify that some damage (or flat-out all damage) can't be prevented. This stops the shields from being used up, but other effects will occur normally - however, if they check how much damage was prevented, the answer will be zero. Note that only effects that explicitly say "prevent" are prevention effects and are powerless against unpreventable damage; effects that reduce or redirect damage but don't use the word "prevent" work normally.

Example. I cast **Pyroclasm**, and my opponent tries the **Refraction Trap** trick of the previous example. I'm ready to respond with a **Flaring Pain**. When **Pyroclasm** resolves, **Refraction Trap** will not be able to prevent damage, so it won't even deal damage. Also, since the immunity to damage granted from protection is actually a prevention effect, my opponent's precious **Silver Knight** will be engulfed by the flames and perish.

If my opponent casts **Harm's Way** instead, it will work normally, since it doesn't use the word "prevent".



Sources of damage

Prevention effects sometimes reference a **source of damage**. The source of damage is the actual object that is dealing damage, and its characteristics are what counts to check if this damage can be prevented.

Some effects ask a player to choose a source to prevent damage from, and sometimes restrict this choice (for example, they specify the source must be red). They usually use the terms **a [restriction] source of your choice**, which means that as part of their resolution, their controller will choose a source, abiding to the given restriction.

Example. Many permanents are going to deal damage to you: creatures (that sometimes have saboteur abilities that are worth stopping, such as **Scroll Thief**), enchantments (such as **Pyromancy** or **Pestilence**), artifacts (**Aladdin's Ring**, **Moonglove Extract**), lands (**Shivan Gorge**, **Valakut, the Molten Pinnacle**), and Planeswalkers (**Chandra Naalar**, **Sorin Markov**).



Spells are also a very common source of damage: **Lightning Bolt**, **Pyroclasm** and friends have roasted countless creatures and players. Interestingly, if you cast **Hallow** targeting **Crater Hellion** while it's a spell on the stack, the prevention effect will apply to the damage it will deal from the battlefield.

Sometimes, the source will end up not dealing damage at all or dealing damage after it changed characteristics. If its characteristics don't match the restriction given by the prevention effect, the shield will not work.

Example. I cast **Lightning Bolt** targeting you, who control a **Circle of Protection: Red**. You must activate your enchantment before the Bolt resolves, and so you do. Note that the Circle of Protection's ability has no targets, so all choices are made upon resolution: as the ability resolves, you choose the **Lightning Bolt** still on the stack as the red source.

If **Lightning Bolt** resolved now, its damage would be prevented. However, I tap my dark side and cast **Deathlace** on **Lightning Bolt**, making it black. **Lightning Bolt** resolves, and since now it doesn't match the restriction on the prevention effect from the **Circle of Protection**, it successfully deals damage.



Just like we have a name for the object that deals the damage, we also have a technical term for the player, creature or planeswalker that suffers it: **recipient of damage**.

Redirection effects

Redirection effects are a special kind of **replacement effects**, so all the rules that apply to replacement effects apply to redirection effects as well. Redirection effects (and only them) always use the words **is dealt to something else instead**.

Sometimes, after a redirection effect has been set up, the new recipient of damage disappears (for example it's sacrificed if it's a creature, or leaves the game if it's a player) or stops being able to receive damage (for example it becomes an enchantment^[1]). In this case, the redirection effect will do nothing, and the original recipient of the damage will take it.

Example. *My opponent casts **Lightning Bolt** targeting one of my creatures, and I respond activating **Oracle's Attendants** ability, that resolves, creating a replacement effect. Then my opponent casts **Doom Blade** targeting my Oracle's Attendants, and destroys it. When **Lightning Bolt** resolves, the redirection effect does nothing, and my creature takes the damage.*



1. ↑ I'm looking at you, **Soul Sculptor**!

Regeneration effects

Regeneration effects are a special kind of **replacement effects**, so all the rules that apply to replacement effects apply to regeneration effects as well. Regeneration effects (and only them) always use the word **regenerate**.

Regenerate is a **keyword action**, that is a specialized verb that is used with some additional rules baggage over the English meaning. "Regenerate" is a bit more complicated than this, since its actual meaning changes based on the subject of the sentence.^[1]

- If we say that a player **regenerates** a permanent, we are saying that he is creating a replacement effect that will replace the permanent's destruction.
- If we say that a permanent **regenerates**, we are saying that the aforementioned replacement effect has been applied to a destruction event.

This means, by the way, that effects that say a permanent can't be regenerated don't keep players from *trying* to regenerate it. However, the regeneration effect will sit there doing nothing.

Example. *Debt of Loyalty* uses the verb with both meanings. The first sentence is a one-shot effect that creates the regeneration shield; the second sentence is a delayed triggered ability that waits for the regeneration effect to replace a destruction event.

Even if a creature has been damaged by **Incinerate** earlier this turn, I can still cast *Debt of Loyalty* targeting it. Of course, the triggered ability will never trigger, so it's not a wise play.



When we regenerate a permanent, we put a sort of "regeneration shield" on it. This shield is used (and we can't choose not to) the next time that permanent would be destroyed this turn. Instead of being destroyed, that permanent:

- stays on the battlefield;^[2]
- becomes tapped;^[3]
- is healed;^[4]
- if it's attacking or blocking, it's removed from combat.

Example. My opponent attacks me with **Youthful Knight**, and I block with **Drudge Skeletons**. Before assigning damage, I activate the Skeletons' ability, creating a regeneration effect for it. The Youthful Knight deals first strike damage, which is enough to destroy Drudge Skeletons, that instead becomes tapped, is removed from combat and damage is removed from it. During the normal damage step, Drudge Skeletons is not in combat any more, so it won't deal damage to Youthful Knight.



The only things that cause destruction are effects that use the word **destroy** and lethal damage. There are many **state-based actions** that move creatures from the battlefield to the graveyard, but are not destruction, so regeneration can't replace them.

Example. Granting a regeneration shield to a **River Boa** means that:

- it will survive a **Doom Blade** (it's a destroy effect)
- it will survive after blocking a much bigger creature, such as a **Kalonian Behemoth** (it's lethal damage)
- a humble **Stabbing Pain** will circumvent its regeneration shield, and mercilessly send the Boa to the graveyard (a creature with zero toughness is not destroyed, it's put into a graveyard)



If a creature with a regeneration shield receives lethal damage, regeneration replaces the destruction event - it does not replace damage being dealt. Abilities and effects that care about damage will apply.

Example. if a **River Boa** blocks a **Knight of Meadowgrain**, and the Boa is regenerated, it will not be destroyed, but the Knight controller will gain 2 life because of lifelink. Also, if the Knight is equipped with an **Umezawa's Jitte**, the equipment will gain two charge counters.



- ↑ This looks less weird if we consider the pre-Classic rules. At that time, when a permanent was destroyed a "regeneration window" opened, during which *only* regeneration effects (that were not legal at any other time) were legal. As you may imagine, those were crazy times.

2. ↑ A creature that's regenerated never hits the graveyard.
3. ↑ If a creature is already tapped at the time it regenerates, never mind. Tapping is an *effect* here, not a cost.
4. ↑ In arid technical terms, all damage marked on it is removed. It's the same thing that happens during the cleanup step.

Enter-the-battlefield effects

Some replacement effects modify the way permanents **enter the battlefield**, usually to alter their status,^[1] putting some kind of counters on them, or affect their characteristics. These effects always use one of the following templates:

- **[This permanent] enters the battlefield with [some counter or ability]**
- **As [this permanent] enters the battlefield [do something]**
- **[This permanent] enters the battlefield as [something]**
- **[This permanent] enters the battlefield [in some state]**
- **[Objects] enter the battlefield [with one of the previous modifications]**

Note that the last affect a whole class of objects, whereas the other templates only affect the object they're printed on: it's worth noting that objects with abilities that affect a class of objects that happens to include themselves will **not** apply their own enter-the-battlefield effect to themselves.

Example. *Triskelion* has an ability that causes itself to enter the battlefield with +1/+1 counters. It's never on the battlefield as a 1/1.

Voice of All asks its controller to choose a color as a part of the process to move it from the zone it's in to the battlefield. It's never on the battlefield with no color chosen. If a token that's a copy of a *Voice of All* is created, a color is chosen as a part of its creation.

Clone modifies its characteristics while it's entering the battlefield. It's a 0/0 blue creature spell, then becomes whatever creature it's copying on the battlefield.

Scarwood Treefolk has an effect that causes it (and itself only) to enter the battlefield tapped. It doesn't enter the battlefield and then becomes tapped; it's never on the battlefield untapped in the first place.

Orb of Dreams causes a class of objects (in its case, all permanents) to enter the battlefield tapped. Even though it's included in the set of objects it affects, it doesn't work on itself - it will enter the battlefield untapped.



If an enter-the-battlefield replacement effect gives a creature that's entering the battlefield a triggered ability, such ability will trigger normally after the process is complete.

Example. If a **Clone** that's entering the battlefield becomes a copy of an **Æther Adept**, it does so in the process of changing zone, so it enters the battlefield with a fresh triggered ability ready to spring.



Interaction with other effects

Sometimes, it will not be immediately clear which effects will apply to a permanent entering the battlefield, and how these effects will apply. In this case, we check the characteristics of the permanent as it would exist on the battlefield considering:

1. replacement effects that have already been applied
2. continuous effects that changed its characteristics on the stack, and
3. continuous effects from the permanent's own static abilities
4. continuous effects from any other source that would affect it once it's on the battlefield

Notably, if the permanent is entering the battlefield from a zone other than the stack, we ignore continuous effects that affect it in the old zone.

Example. **Clone** is resolving. Its replacement effect asks its controller to choose a creature on the battlefield: a **Voice of All** is chosen. Now the Cloned Angel has a new enter-the-battlefield effect, so its controller chooses a color.



Example. My opponent controls **Blood Moon** and I play a **Watery Grave**. Since we consider the effect from Blood Moon when checking which replacement effects will apply, my land will enter the battlefield as an untapped **Mountain** without asking me to pay life (actually, I can't choose to pay 2 life, even if I would like to, as Watery Grave's ability is wiped out by Blood Moon).



Example. I control **Sage of Fables** and **Conspiracy** for which I have chosen "Wizard", and I cast a **Lord of Atlantis**. Lord of Atlantis will enter the battlefield as a Wizard (and trigger **Diviner's Wand** in the process), and Sage of Fables will apply to it, as Conspiracy's effect is one of the four types above.

On the other hand, if I have **Ashes of the Fallen** for which I have chosen "Wizard" and cast **Reanimate** targeting a Lord of Atlantis in my graveyard, the Sage of Fables will not apply to it, since Lord of Atlantis will not be a Wizards on the battlefield and continuous effects that apply to it in the graveyard are ignored.



- I. ↑ For example, having them enter the battlefield tapped or face-down.

Effects with special rules

In this chapter we introduce, one by one, some very faceted effects that need detailed explanation and can lead to complicated interactions.

[Copy effects](#) have existed since the very beginnings of the game. They can be split up into two categories: effects that copy objects on the stack, such as **Fork**, and effects that copy permanents, such as **Clone**. Having multiple of the latter can cause headaches!

[Type-changing effects](#) are quite common and, most of the time, intuitive. Until you decide to play **Blood Moon**.

[Power and toughness modifiers](#) can be an important strategic part of a game, but what happens when you combine **Giant Growth** with **Turn to Frog**?

We will finish by looking at [protection](#), a very powerful ability that is often misleading, since it is actually made up of *four* different abilities!

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Copy effects

Some objects become or turn another object into a copy of a spell, permanent, or card. Some effects put a token onto the battlefield that is a copy of another object. These effects, and only these effects, will use the word **copy**, either as a verb or as a noun. ,

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Copying permanents

This is the most common way a player will copy something. There are three ways in which an object on the battlefield can be copied:

- a spell resolves as a permanent that enters the battlefield as a copy of an object already on the battlefield (**Clone**);
- a spell or ability creates a token that's a copy of an object already on the battlefield (**Spitting Image**);
- an object on the battlefield has an ability that can make it into a copy of an object already on the battlefield (**Shapesharer**).

Regardless of the way a permanent becomes a copy of something else, the following rules will always apply.

Copiable values

When copying permanents, the copy acquires only the **copiable values** of the original object's characteristics. For a regular permanent, the copiable values are the values that derive from the text^[1] printed on it.

Note that, as the copy acquires the mana cost and the color indicator, it will also acquire the color of the object. Notably, copy effects do not copy any counters on the object, any static effects currently applying to it, the status of the object (tapped or untapped, flipped or not), the illustrator, and the set number.

Example. Polis Crusher is tapped, monstrous, and has three +1/+1 counters on it. If **Clone** enters the battlefield as a copy of Polis Crusher, it will become a card with the name "Polis Crusher", mana cost of 2 ♠ ♣ , and type Creature - Cyclops. It will have the following abilities: trample, protection from enchantments, "4 ♣ : Monstrosity 3", "Whenever Polis Crusher deals combat damage to a player, if Polis Crusher is monstrous, destroy target enchantment that player controls". It will have the power and toughness of 4/4 and it will come into play untapped.

Note how the copied permanent being tapped, monstrous, and with three +1/+1 counters on it was not copied.



Example. Phyrexian Totem's ability is used to make it a 5/5 black Horror artifact creature with trample. Then a **Clone** enters the battlefield as a copy of Phyrexian Totem. The Clone will **not** be a 5/5 black Horror artifact creature with trample. It's a copy of a non-animated Phyrexian Totem. Of course, it will become a creature if its ability is activated.



Entering the battlefield as a copy

Some permanents specify that they become a copy of something "as *[this permanent]* enters the battlefield" or that "you may have *[this permanent]* enter the battlefield as" a copy of something. It's very important to understand that *these are not triggered abilities*; rather, these abilities are a subset of **replacement effects**. The decision of which object to copy is made while the spell is resolving or the permanent is otherwise entering the battlefield, and never targets anything. Thus, the copying object enters the battlefield already as a copy; it does not enter the battlefield and then become a copy - there's no moment in time when the permanent is on the battlefield without being a copy. Notably, this means that permanents that enter the battlefield as a copy of another object will trigger enter-the-battlefield abilities printed on the copied permanent.

Example. If a *Clone* enters the battlefield as a copy of **Kor Skyfisher**, the enter-the-battlefield ability that returns a permanent you control to its owner's hand will trigger.



Choices made for a permanent are not usually copied when copying that permanent. Instead, when an object enters the battlefield as a copy of a permanent that requires a choice "as *[this permanent]* enters the battlefield", the controller of the copy will be able to make new choices for it.

Example. I control a **True-Name Nemesis**, for which I obviously chose my opponent. Then my opponent plays a *Clone*, and chooses to copy *True-Name Nemesis*. The choice I made for my *True-Name Nemesis* is not copied; my opponent will choose the player for his copy of *True-Name Nemesis*.



If a permanent becomes a copy of another permanent with such an ability, its controller will not be able to make any choice, as the copy did not enter the battlefield again.

Example. A face-down **Vesuvan Shapeshifter** and a **Voice of All** for which red was chosen are on the battlefield. *Vesuvan Shapeshifter* is turned face up and becomes a copy of *Voice of All*. The choice of color is not copied, and since the *Vesuvan Shapeshifter* did not enter the battlefield, *Voice of All*'s replacement effect does not kick in. No color is chosen, so the ability that would grant it protection will have no effect.



Copying spells

Some spells or abilities create a copy of a spell while it's on the stack. A copy of a spell is itself a spell, even though it has no card associated with it.

All choices made as the original spell was cast are copied. This includes mode, targets, the value of X, how it will affect multiple targets, and so on. This also includes whether additional or alternative costs (such as kicker, overload or entwine) were paid. Choices that are normally made on resolution are not copied. If an effect of the copy refers to objects used to pay its costs, it uses the objects used to pay the costs of the original spell or ability.

Some copy effects^[2] allow the controller to choose new targets for the copy. The controller can leave any number of the targets unchanged, even if they would be illegal. However, if he decides to change any, new targets must be legal.

Example. ***Twincast** is played copying **Fling**. The amount of damage dealt to the target is equal to the power of the creature sacrificed to pay for the original spell. A new target can be chosen only because **Twincast** allows it.*



A copy of a spell was never *cast*, so abilities that trigger on spells being cast won't trigger.

Example. *If you're in the process of killing me with a **Brain Freeze** with a high storm count, I can certainly copy your Brain Freeze with a **Twincast**, but as the copy appears directly on the stack without being cast, its storm ability won't trigger.*



On the other hand, some effects (such as **Elite Arcanist** and **Isochron Scepter**), copy a *card* and then allow you to cast the copy. In this case, the copy is created in the same zone the original object is, and then the copy is cast while the ability is still resolving.

Example. *Fire // Ice* is imprinted on **Isochron Scepter**.

After Isochron Scepter's ability is activated, a copy of the *Fire // Ice* card is created in the exile zone while Isochron Scepter's ability is resolving. Then, the controller of Isochron Scepter's ability can choose to cast either *Fire* or *Ice* and add it to the stack.



Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



Interaction of copy effects

We said above that the copiable values of a permanent are derived from its text, and its text alone. However, there are exceptions to this. Most notably, if I try to copy a permanent that's already copying something else, the "copy of a copy" has the form of what was copied in the first place.

Example. A **Goblin Guide** and a **Clone** that copied the **Goblin Guide** are on the battlefield. The original **Goblin Guide** gets **Terminated**, then I cast a second **Clone** choosing the **Clone** already on a battlefield for the copy effect. The second **Clone** does not enter as a o/o Shapeshifter; it is actually a copy of the **Goblin Guide**, too.



Some copy effects modify the copying process, causing the copy to gain an ability or not to copy certain aspects. Such exceptions are considered part of the copy effect. Any such exception or modification to a copy effect becomes part of the copiable values for the copy, so a copy of a copy keeps all of them.

Example. As **Sakashima the Impostor** enters the battlefield, **Snapping Drake** is chosen as the creature it will copy. It will become a **Legendary Creature – Drake** named "Sakashima the Impostor", with a mana cost of **3** and base power and toughness 3/2. It will have flying and **"2: Return Sakashima the Impostor to its owner's hand at the beginning of the next end step."**

Now, a **Phantasmal Image** enters the battlefield, copying **Sakashima the Impostor**, who is currently impersonating a **Snapping Drake**. It will become a **Legendary Creature – Drake Illusion** named "Sakashima the Impostor", with a mana cost of **3** and base power and toughness 3/2. It will have flying, **"2: Return Sakashima the Impostor to its owner's hand at the beginning of the next end step."** and **"When this creature becomes target of a spell or ability, sacrifice it."**

If a **Clone** enters the battlefield copying the **Phantasmal Image** **Sakashima the Snapping Drake**... You get the idea.



Copying morphed and transformed cards

Another effect that can affect the copiable values of a permanent is turning that permanent face down. If a face-down card is copied, the copy will be a 2/2 colorless creature with no name, no types, no abilities, and no mana cost. Note that the copy will not be a face-down creature: it will be a face-up vanilla 2/2. On the other hand, if a face-down creature becomes a copy of something else, this effect will be "masked" by the morph effect, so the creature will stay a faceless 2/2 - but if I turn it face up, I'll reveal the thing it copied. Yes, it's complicated.

When copying a double-faced card, only the face that is currently up is copied. If the creature that's copying the double-faced card is not a double-faced card of its own, it can't ever transform, no matter how hard we try. Being double-faced is a physical property of a card (much like being a token), and as such is not part of the copiable values.

Example. We cast an unassuming **Clone**. Then madness begins:

- If **Clone** copies a face-down **Blistering Firecat**, it enters the battlefield as a 2/2 colorless creature with no name, no types, no abilities, and no mana cost, because these are the copiable values set by the face-down status. **Clone** is still face up and thus it cannot be turned face up.
- If **Clone** copies a face-up **Blistering Firecat** instead, and then an **Ixidron** is cast, the cloned **Blistering Firecat** will be turned face down, but can be turned face up paying its morph cost of $\{2\}$. The copy effect had the **Clone** acquire the face up values and it keeps them, even though while it's face down its characteristics are set to a 2/2 faceless creature.
- If **Clone** copies a **Ravager of the Fells**, it becomes exactly what we see: a bloodthirsty werewolf. Moreover, it cannot transform back into **Huntmaster of the Fells**, even if the requirements are met, as **Clone** is not a double-faced card!



The case of a **Delver of Secrets** becoming a copy of a **Ravager of the Fells** courtesy of **Cytoshape** is left as an exercise to the reader.

1. ↑ The text of a permanent consists of: name, mana cost, color indicator, card type, subtype, supertype, rules text, power, toughness, and/or loyalty
2. ↑ Most of them, actually.

Type-changing effects

Type-changing effects are those effects that change an object's card type, subtype or supertype. This can happen in two fashions: either the effect specifies that the object retains the prior card type, subtype or supertype; or the effect completely replaces the old type, subtype or supertype with a new one.

Characteristics not referred to in the effect description remain unchanged.

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- 1 Effects that keep the type
 - 1.1 Becoming an artifact creature
- 2 Replacing type, subtype, or supertype
- 3 Changing to a basic land type
- 4 Copy effects and type-changing effects

Effects that keep the type

When a type-changing effect allows the affected object to keep its original type, subtype or supertype, it uses one of the following templates:

- "becomes <some type> in addition to its other types."
- "becomes <some type>. It's still a <old type>."
- "becomes an artifact creature."

Note that, regardless of the <old type> specified in the second template and the very specific verbiage of the third, the permanent will keep all of its previous types, subtypes and supertypes.

Example. I have an **Attended Knight** in my graveyard and I reanimate it with **Rise from the Grave**. Its subtype becomes "Human Zombie Knight" and its color becomes white and black because **Rise from the Grave** specifies "in addition to".



Example. I target a **Mountain** with **Skarrg Guildmage**'s animation ability, that makes it into an Elemental creature, but specifies that "it's still a land", therefore Mountain will be a "Land Creature - Mountain Elemental". Please note that "Elemental" is the subtype associated to the "creature" type, and "Mountain" is the subtype associated to the "land" type.

If I activate the same ability targeting a **Darksteel Citadel**, it will become an "Artifact Land Creature - Elemental" with indestructible.



Example. I control a **Flagstones of Trokair** and a **Hinterland Harbor**. I use them to cast **Prismatic Omen**. Now both the lands are "Land - Plains Island Swamp Mountain Forest", but acquiring the basic land subtypes does not make them lands with a Basic supertype. Moreover, Flagstones of Trokair is still Legendary.



Becoming an artifact creature

Some effects state that an object becomes an "artifact creature"; these effects allow the object to retain all its previous types and supertypes. This is an exception to the general rule about adding a type: specifying that the object keeps its previous type or subtype is not needed, since it does by definition. The reason for this is that artifacts that animate into artifact creatures are very common since *Alpha*, so the rules accommodate this succinct template for them.

Example. Activating **Tezzeret, Agent of Bolas**'s second ability targeting a **Bident of Thassa** transforms the type line of the Bident into "Legendary Enchantment Artifact Creature", even though the ability does not specify anything about the Bident of Thassa retaining its original types. The Bident does not lose its abilities, since a type-changing effect does not mess up with the card text (with a single exception that we'll see in a while).



Replacing type, subtype, or supertype

Some effects completely replace the previous types an object had. In these cases, the text of the effect says that the permanent "becomes <some type>" or "is <some type>", and it does not specify that the effect adds a new type or keeps the previous one.

Example. I cast **Turn to Frog** on **Ajani's Pridemate**: the Cat Soldier becomes "Creature - Frog" (and it also becomes blue, loses all its abilities and its power and toughness are set to 1/1).



Example. **Conspiracy** resolves and I choose to name "Weird". The effect of Conspiracy does not affect only permanents, but cards in other game zones as well: my **Figure of Destiny** will be put on the stack as a Weird creature spell.

In the following turn, I activate Figure of Destiny's first ability: the effect of this ability will overwrite Conspiracy's effect, and the Figure of Destiny will become a "Creature - Kithkin Spirit".



Example. I control **Glory Seeker** and **Intrepid Hero**. A **Leyline of Singularity** enters the battlefield. Both creatures are now "Legendary Creature - Human Soldier".



Changing to a basic land type

Changing a land's type to one of the five basic land types^[1] without specifying "in addition to its other types" comes with additional rules baggage. The land will:

- gain the intrinsic mana ability linked to the basic land type it becomes;
- lose its previous land subtypes, which means it will also lose the intrinsic mana ability linked to any basic land type it had;
- lose all abilities generated by its text and by copy effects.

Any other card types (such as artifact or creature) or supertypes (such as basic or legendary) the land may have are kept.

Example. I control a **Celestial Colonnade** and my opponent enchants it with **Convincing Mirage**, choosing "Forest". The Colonnade keeps its name, gains the "Forest" subtype (but not the "Basic" supertype) and its text box will be overwritten with "☞: Add 🌲".

The Colonnade will not be able to animate itself, it will only tap for Green mana, and it will still be a legal target for a **Tectonic Edge**.



Example. I activate **Mizzium Transreliquat**'s second ability targeting a **Darksteel Citadel**: it becomes an "Artifact Land" named Darksteel Citadel with indestructible, "☞: Add 1." and "1 🌲 ☞: Mizziium Transreliquat becomes a copy of target artifact and gains this ability."

Blood Moon enters the battlefield: as **Mizzium Transreliquat** is currently a non-basic land, **Blood Moon** will turn it into a **Mountain**, that will strip it of any abilities generated by its copy effect, but it will not touch it's card types. **Mizzium Transreliquat** is now an "Artifact Land - Mountain" with "☞: Add 🌲." and no other ability.



Note that only the abilities generated by the text of the land or by copy effects will be lost; if something else gives an ability to the land, that ability will stay, regardless of when the type-changing effect has been generated.

Example. My **Celestial Colonnade** is enchanted with **Leafdrake Roost** and my opponent casts a **Magus of the Moon**. The Colonnade will gain the "Mountain" subtype, and it will have both the ability to produce 🌑 and the ability to create a creature token.



Copy effects and type-changing effects

In the end, let's make a brief mention about the interaction between **copy effects** and type-changing effects. As we know, copy effects will only take into account the original object's copiable values, that can be effected only by other copy effects or "enter the battlefield" replacement effects. All remaining effects, including type-changing effects are not copied.

Example. The only creature on the battlefield is **Stormbreath Dragon**, and I cast **Evil Twin**. In response to **Evil Twin**, my opponent (who has not read this book) casts **Turn** on **Stormbreath Dragon**, turning it into a 0/1 red Weird. Nonetheless, **Evil Twin** becomes a shiny copy of **Stormbreath Dragon**, ignoring **Turn**'s effect.



This is particularly notable when someone tries to copy an artifact or a land that has been animated, such as a **Chimeric Staff** and **Mutavault**: the copy will enter the battlefield as a *non-animated* copy, as the effect that turns it into a creature will not be copied.

Example. If **Clone** enters the battlefield when **Chimeric Staff** is a creature, it can become a copy of Chimeric Staff, but it will not enter the battlefield as a creature, even though the Staff is currently an "Artifact Creature - Construct". Clone simply becomes a copy of the non-animated Chimeric Staff artifact, with the ability to become an "Artifact Creature - Construct". In other words, it copies only the original characteristics of the object.



1. ↑ Plains, Island, Swamp, Mountain, and Forest

Power and toughness modifiers

In **Magic**, plenty of effects interact with the power and toughness of our creatures, and sometimes they change during the game. In this chapter we'll illustrate all of the effects that modify the power and toughness of creatures, what they are and how they work with each other.

The interaction between these effects falls under the great management system of continuous effects known as the **layers** system, more comprehensive but much harder to explain. In this chapter we will deal with a smaller set of possible interactions.

Continuous effects that change power and toughness are applied in the order listed below:

1. Effects from characteristic-defining abilities
2. Effects that set the base power and toughness to a specific value
3. Effects that increase or decrease power and toughness
4. Effects that switch a creature's power and toughness

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- [1 Characteristic-defining abilities](#)
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- [3 Increasing or decreasing power and toughness](#)
 - [3.1 Counters](#)
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Characteristic-defining abilities

Sometimes, an object's characteristics have a peculiar value that doesn't fit in the standard layout of the card: **Tarmogoyf** would really like to have "the number of card types among cards in all graveyards / the number of card types among cards in all graveyards plus 1" written in the lower right corner, but that would be... impractical. For this reason, this value is left undefined on the card, and an ability in the card's text defines the characteristic's value: these abilities are known as **characteristics-defining abilities**, and are always applied before other effects, as they are kind of the default value of the characteristic they set.

Note that abilities gained in any way other than a copy effect can't be a characteristic-setting abilities, and that abilities that can be "turned off" by some condition are not CDA, either.

Characteristic-defining abilities work **in every zone**, not only on the battlefield.

Example. ***Tarmogoyf** has the iconic characteristic-defining ability: it's printed power and toughness are marked by a little star, and their actual value is defined by the ability in its text box. This ability works in any game zone: a well-known Legacy deck that was played some years ago would reanimate **Sutured Ghoul** and exile four Tarmogoyfs with its ability: as their ability works from exile, the Ghoul resulted in a 20/24 or bigger.*



Setting base power and toughness

Some effects set power and toughness to a specific number. These effects can come from:

- the resolution of a spell or ability: **Turn to Frog**, **Sorceress Queen**, **Dragonshift**
- the static ability of a permanent: **Humility**, **Gigantiform**, **Ensoul Artifact**, **Treetop Village**

Example. ***Godhead of Awe** is on the battlefield, and a **Tarmogoyf** enters the battlefield. Even though Tarmogoyf's ability is newer than Godhead's, it must be applied first, because it's a characteristics-defining ability. The Tarmogoyf is a 1/1.*



Some spells and abilities set power and toughness to a values that depends on some other characteristics: even if the final value is not specified, it is determined when the spell or ability resolves, so these effects belong in this category.

Example. *The activated ability of Karn, Silver Golem sets power and toughness for target artifact to its converted mana cost.*



Increasing or decreasing power and toughness

Some effects add or subtract some value from the current power and toughness of a creature. These effects may or may not have a defined duration, and always use the verb "to get" followed by one of the arithmetical symbols "+" or "-".

Example. ***Zealous Persecution** gives a +1/+1 bonus to each of our creatures and a -1/-1 malus to each of our opponent's creatures until end of turn. Glorious Anthem gives an additional +1/+1 to each of our creatures until it leaves the battlefield.*



These effects are always applied *after* effects that set power and toughness to a specific number, regardless of which effect was created first.

Example. I activate my **Treetop Village** to turn it into a 3/3 creature and attack with it. After you declare no blockers, I target it with a **Titanic Growth**, that makes it a 7/7. However, before taking damage, you cast **Turn to Frog** on it.

Both the effect of it's activated ability (that makes it 3/3) and Turn to Frog (that makes it 1/1) try to set power and toughness to specific value, so the latest will win: Turn to Frog overwrites the power and toughness set by Treetop Village's ability. However, since Titanic Growth increases the characteristics, rather than setting them, it will always apply after Turn to Frog. Treetop Village becomes a 5/5 blue Frog creature.



If an effect of this type results in a negative value for a creature's power, it will count as such for other similar effects, but it will be considered zero in every case the negative value makes no sense.^[1]

Example. I attack with a **Glory Seeker** and my opponent casts **Hydrosurge**. Glory Seeker is now a -3/2: if it assigned damage in this moment, the game would use a value of zero for the power, so no damage to be inflicted, as there is no such thing as "negative damage".

If I want to deal some damage to my opponent, I could cast a **Titanic Growth**, that would make Glory Seeker a 1/6.



Counters

A counter is a marker put on a permanent which modifies its characteristics or interacts with abilities, rules or effects. Counters are not objects and have no characteristic. When an object with a counter on it moves from a zone to another, all counters on it cease to exist.

Counters that modify power and toughness are defined with algebraic values: +0/+2, -0/-1, +3/-3 and other such counters were especially used in the past, but nowadays only +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters are used. If a creature has both +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters on it, state-based actions annihilate them in pairs until only counters of one type remain.

For the purpose of calculating power and toughness, counters are considered alike to other effects that increase or decrease these characteristics.

Example. I use **Incremental Growth** on **Grizzly Bears**, **Trained Armodon** and **Rumbling Baloth**. Then my opponent casts **Incremental Blight** on the same creatures, in the same order. Since we are dealing with +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters, the "cancel out" rule comes up and makes my trained beasts turn back to their wilderness.



Counters that modify power and toughness can be put on a creature by a spell of ability, or a replacement effect may put them on the creature at the time it enters the battlefield. They can even be put on non-creature permanents, if the effect allows it, but in that case they will have no interesting effect until that permanent becomes a creature.

Example. **Mistcutter Hydra** enters the battlefield with X +1/+1 counters on it, with a replacement effect depending on the chosen X value.

The "modular N" ability found on **Arcbound Ravager** is a keyword that defines both the replacement effect "This creature enters the battlefield with N +1/+1 counters on it." and the triggered ability "When this permanent is put into a graveyard from play, you may put its +1/+1 counters on target artifact creature."



Example. I animate **Mutavault** and I use the second ability of **Ajani Goldmane** on it. The counter will remain on the land even after it stops being a creature, but it will be significant for the game only when Mutavault is animated again.



Switching power and toughness

These effects, that always use the verb **switch**, switch power and toughness of the creature, so they take the value of the power and put it in the value of the toughness and vice versa. Naturally, switching power and

toughness two times will give us back the original value.

Example. I attack with *Aquamoeba*, and my opponent chooses not to block, so I discard a card to deal 3 damage. He lets the ability resolve and, still before damage, casts *Shock* on *Aquamoeba*. I discard another card to have my *Aquamoeba* survive, and it will deal just 1 damage.



Interaction between power and toughness modifiers

Now we are able to assign each effect that modifies power and toughness to one of the four categories above (that we can also call **layers**), and then we can apply them all in order to calculate the final result. If more effects are applicable in the same layer, we apply them in the order they were created - this is called **timestamp order**. Let's do this!

Example. I control *Tarmogoyf* and *Glorious Anthem*, while in the graveyard there are only instant and creature cards. Let's start from the first layer: *Tarmogoyf*'s characteristic-defining ability makes it a 2/3. Then *Glorious Anthem* applies, making it a 3/4.



So far, so good.

Example. After all this complicated calculations, I finally attack with my huge dude, and my opponent casts **Diminish**! How much damage will it deal?

Diminish sets Tarmogoyf's base power and toughness to 1/1, so it applies in the second layer, thus overwriting its characteristic-defining ability. However, since *Glorious Anthem* applies in the third layer, its effect will not be overwritten: Tarmogoyf will be a 2/2, so 2 damage will be dealt. Note that the fact that *Diminish* resolved later than *Glorious Anthem* doesn't really matter for the final result.



Example. Finally I think my opponent has run over of his little tricks, so I can pump up my creature with **Reckless Charge** and tap it threateningly... how much threateningly?

A sorcery touched my graveyard, so in the first layer my dude becomes a 3/4; nothing happens in the second layer, and then in the third layer *Glorious Anthem* and *Reckless Charge* are applied; I must apply them in timestamp order, but thanks to the arithmetical commutative property, in this layer I have a grand total of +4/+1 anyway, so Tarmogoyf is a tremendous 7/5!



Example. I was a little reckless, indeed: my opponent casts **Inside Out**. The exchange happens in the last layer, so it must be applied after all the calculations we made before. Tarmogoyf will be "shrunk" to 5/7.



If my opponent had cast **Inside Out** in response to **Reckless Charge** instead, it would have made little no difference: the Tarmogoyf would have ended up as a 5/7 anyway.

Example. Erase and rewind of the previous case: **Inside Out** is cast in response to **Reckless Charge**. Immediately after **Inside Out** resolves, but still in response to **Reckless Charge**, my opponent casts **Lightning Bolt**, what happens?

When **Inside Out** resolves, since **Reckless Charge** hasn't resolved yet, **Inside Out** applies to **Tarmogoyf** while it's $2/3 + 1/1 = 3/4$. In the little time window before **Reckless Charge** resolves, **Tarmogoyf** will be $4/3$, deadly threatened by **Lightning Bolt** (there are already instants in the graveyard, remember?).

I, pretty smart because I've read this article, cast **Fortify** in response to **Lightning Bolt**, choosing the $+2/+0$ mode (not the $+0/+2$!). As **Fortify** resolves, it is applied in the third layer, before the exchange is performed: **Tarmogoyf** becomes a $5/4$ before switching, so it ultimately becomes a $4/5$ and survives the **Lightning Bolt**.

Finally, **Reckless Charge** resolves, increasing the little stars printed on our card and going again into the third layer, along with **Glorious Anthem** and **Fortify**, making **Tarmogoyf** a huge $5/8$.



Now that you are expert Mathemagicians, try to solve this puzzle!

Example. I control **Aquamoeba**, enchanted with **Unholy Strength**. I attack, my opponent declares no blockers, and I activate my **Aquamoeba**'s ability. What happens if, in response to my activation, my opponent casts **Puncture Bolt** and then **Diminish** in response to his own **Puncture Bolt**?



1. ↑ A negative value for the toughness, of course, will kill the creature outright.

Protection

Protection is one of the oldest keyword abilities, as it has existed since *Alpha*. It is both powerful and complex, as it actually generates several effects. So, let's start with the basics.

Protection is a static ability of permanents (so not only creatures). The protection ability may also be granted to players by some cards or effects. The ability is usually written as "**protection from [quality]**", where [quality], while usually a color, can be any characteristic such as card name, card type, subtype or mana cost.

Protection may be regarded as four different abilities, and we will proceed to explain each of those in detail. You can easily remember them by using the acronym **DEBT**. That means that a permanent or player with protection from a quality cannot be **D**amaged, **E**nchanted (or **E**quipped), **B**locked, or **T**argeted by sources that have that quality.

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Cannot be targeted

The first effect acts as a sort of shroud applied only to the sources with the stated quality. Just like shroud, the protected permanent or player cannot be targeted, regardless of who controls the source of the effect trying to target it (so it is not like hexproof).

Example. Player A attacks with a **Black Knight**. Player B has an Azorius Charm in hand but he cannot use the Charm to put the knight on top of A's library as it is a white card.



Example. We are in the same situation of the above example. Player A is attacking with his **Black Knight**, holding a **Faith's Shield** in his hand. This time, Player B has an **Ultimate Price** and he plays it targeting the Knight. Now, granting protection from black to the knight would make it an illegal target for the **Ultimate Price**, but A cannot target it with his **Faith's Shield**, as it is a white card. The fact that A controls both the Knight and the Shield doesn't matter.

Now, let's suppose A has only 5 life. **Faithful hour** kicks in and Player A can use **Faith's Shield** targeting another of his permanents to grant him and all his permanents (including the Knight) protection from black. Since the Knight is not a legal target anymore for the **Ultimate Price**, it won't resolve and it'll be removed from the stack.



As shown in the example above, this shroud-like effect doesn't have any interaction with spells and abilities that are not targeted, or with the ones that don't directly target the protected permanents or player. So a **Black Knight** will still die from a **Supreme Verdict**, and a **White Knight** can be sacrificed to a **Devour Flesh**, as it targets the player, not the creature.

A case worth mentioning, related to the next effect of protection, are Aura cards. An Aura is the only kind of permanent that requires a target upon being cast. So it won't be possible to cast an Aura spell targeting a permanent or player protected from it. Still, it is possible for an Aura card to enter the battlefield without being cast (using the ability from **Sun Titan**, from example). An Aura put on the battlefield this way must simply be assigned to a permanent that it could legally enchant. This leads us to talk about the second effect of protection.

Cannot be enchanted or equipped

The second effect of protection involves cards that are attached to permanents and players, such as Auras and Equipments.^[1] So a permanent or player protected from a quality cannot be enchanted or equipped by cards that have the stated quality.

To support this effect, a **state-based action** is defined, that takes care of the situation where an enchanted/equipped permanent gains protection after being enchanted/equipped. The state-based action unattaches the card, and in case of Auras, since those can only exist on the battlefield enchanting a permanent, they will be put in their owner graveyard. Equipments will just become unattached. This takes care of the situation where an enchanted or equipped permanent gains protection after being enchanted.

Example. My opponent attacks me with a creature equipped with **Umezawa's Jitte**. Before the damage step, I use my **Tower of the Magistrate** to give the creature protection from artifacts. This will cause the Jitte to become "fall off" from the creature.



If an effect tries to enchant or equip a protected permanent, the part of the effect that tries to do so simply won't do anything. If the effect would cause the Aura or Equipment to change zone, the card will remain in the old zone. If an effect simply tries to put an Aura on the battlefield, this will be possible only if there are permanents that the aura can legally enchant.

Example. Player A casts an **Obzedat's Aid** targeting a **Pacifism** in his graveyard. Player B controls a **Cartel Aristocrat** and a Spirit token. In response to the **Obzedat's Aid**, Player B sacrifices the Spirit token to grant his **Aristocrat** protection from white. **Pacifism** now cannot be put on the battlefield, as there are no permanent it can legally enchant. If Player A controlled a creature himself, he would be forced to enchant it with his own **Pacifism**.



Cannot be damaged

The third effect of protection is a **prevention effect**. All damage that would be dealt to a protected permanent by a source with the stated quality is prevented. Since this is a prevention effect, the damage event never happens, so any ability that triggers on damage being dealt won't trigger at all. If the damage can't be prevented for any reason (for example after a player has cast **Skullcrack**), then this part of protection doesn't work.

Example. If a **Pyroclasm** is cast and **Vulshok Refugee** is on the battlefield, the 2 damage that would be dealt to it are prevented. However, if **Leyline of Punishment** is on the battlefield, the prevention effect will not work, and the Vulshok Refugee will die. Also notice that **Pyroclasm** can affect a creature protected from red, as it is not targeted.



Cannot be blocked

The last effect of protection involve combat. Any creature protected from a quality cannot be blocked by a creature with the stated quality. This is a **restriction** that applies only when blockers are declared. If a creature is already blocked it is not possible to "unblock" it by giving it protection from the creature that is blocking it. The blocking restriction can only work if the creature is already protected at the beginning of the declare blockers step, so the last useful time to give protection to an attacking creature is during the declare attackers step.

Example. A **White Knight** cannot block an attacking **Black Knight**, and vice versa. Being protected from each other doesn't cancel out the effects of protection so both cannot be blocked by the other. A joust challenge dating back to Alpha that will never be resolved - this is really the stuff of legends!



Unusual protections

As we said in the introduction, a permanent or player can be protected not only from colors, but from any characteristic, or any combination of them. Some protection abilities can create confusion, and those will now be explained in detail. Some of those abilities have been printed on a single card only.

Protection from creatures

Protection from creatures falls in the category of protection from a type, supertype or subtype, as creature is a card type. Usually, if an ability refers to a type, supertype or subtype, it only refers to *permanents* of that type. For example, creatures are actually "creatures" only while they are on the battlefield, otherwise they are "creature cards". Protection is an exception to this rule. A card with protection from creatures is protected

from all creature permanents and also creature cards is all zones. So a permanent protected from creatures cannot be targeted by abilities from creatures and creature cards, cannot be damaged by creatures, and cannot be blocked. Creatures cannot enchant or equip, and creature spells are never targeted, so the other protection effects are not relevant.

Example. *Player A controls a 1/1 Bird token enchanted with **Holy Mantle**. His opponent is at 5 life. When attacking with the bird, Player A cannot use the bloodrush ability of **Skinbrand Goblin** to deal the remaining 2 damage, because the bird is protected from creatures and cannot be targeted by the bloodrush ability, as its source is a creature card.*



Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



Protection from everything



Only printed on **Progenitus**, protection from everything had a rule specifically created to handle it. A permanent that is protected from everything is protected from any object regardless of its characteristics. In other words, all damage that would be dealt to Progenitus is prevented, it can't be enchanted or equipped, it can't be blocked and it can't be targeted.

As usual, it can still be destroyed by effects that does not target him directly like a **Wrath of God** or a **Toxic Deluge** for 10. We can also use sacrifice effects that target its controller, like **Liliana of the Veil**'s second

ability. Also since the protection ability only works while Progenitus is on the battlefield, it can still be countered while it's on the stack.

Lastly, an important note is that the protection ability also applies to Progenitus's controller. So the player who controls it can make it bigger with effects like **Honor of the Pure**, but he can't use a targeted spell like **Berserk** to get its power to 20.

Protection from colored spells



Printed only on the most powerful of the Eldrazi titans, **Emrakul, the Aeons Torn**, protection from colored spells is indeed quite unusual. To understand it, it is useful to review what a spell is. A spell is a card on the stack, a copy of a spell, or a copy of a card that is cast. So Emrakul is protected just from these.

Theoretically the usual four "DEBT" effects apply, but since a spell is not something that could block it in combat or enchant it (an Aura only enchants something only when it is a permanent, not a spell), there are only two relevant effects: Emrakul can't be damaged or targeted by colored spells.

That means that a **Bonfire of the Damned** for 15 cannot kill it as the damage is prevented (it is a spell when the damage is dealt, and it is red), but it is possible to target and damage it using **Ghostfire**, since it is colorless.^[2]

It is not possible to cast a **Pacifism** on it, since Emrakul would not be a legal target, but Pacifism can actually legally enchant it, if it enters the battlefield in some other way, because it would be a permanent and not a spell. Emrakul can also be targeted by abilities, so it can be exiled with **Oblivion Ring** and stolen by **Sower of Temptations**.

Protection from a player



Recently printed on **True-Name Nemesis** from the *Commander 2013* set, this protection ability also came with an update to the comprehensive rules to handle it specifically. It works like "protection from everything", but it only applies to objects controlled by that specific player, or owned by that player and not controlled by anyone else.

In a classic two players game, it is a strictly better version of protection from everything. A True-Name Nemesis will look like a Progenitus from the side of the named player, but the player controlling it (or other players in a multiplayer game) will be able to equip or enchant it, and can use spells to target it.

Example. Consider a multiplayer game, with players named A, B, C. Player A controls a True-Name Nemesis, naming player B. Player B casts a **Pyroclasm**. If the Pyroclasm were to resolve now, the damage to True-Name Nemesis would be prevented as the Pyroclasm is controlled by player B. When Player C gets priority, he uses **Commandeer** on the Pyroclasm. Then all players pass priority and let the stack resolve. In this case when the Pyroclasm resolves, it will deal 2 damage to the Nemesis because even if it is owned by player B, its controller is currently player C, and the Nemesis is not protected from him.

Now, in the same scenario, A is attacking B using the Nemesis. B uses **Act of Aggression** to take control of a creature controlled and owned by player C. After the Act resolves, the stolen creature still cannot block the Nemesis, because this time, despite being owned by another player, it is now controlled by player B and the Nemesis is also protected from it.



1. ↑ And Fortifications, as seen on **Darksteel Garrison**, which we are never going to mention again.
2. ↑ This is, by the way, a huge flavor win, as **Ugin, the Spirit Dragon**, mentioned in Ghostfire's flavor text, is one of the three 'walkers who trapped the Eldrazi in the edrons on Zendikar ages ago.

Layers

Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



With over eleven thousand cards and counting, Magic sports a great variety of [effects](#). When these effects are [continuous](#), they interact with one another in ways that may not always be intuitive or easy to understand. If you're a judge or have been thinking to become one, you probably don't need to be reminded of this card:



Mark Rosewater recounts that, after designing **Humility**, he was really satisfied of his creation, that he deemed *simple and easy*. And it really is, by itself. The pain begins when Humility interacts with other cards.

For years, rulings were handled on a case-by-case basis by [Stephen D'Angelo](#), a rules guru that wasn't even affiliated with Wizards of the Coast.^[1] When **Sixth Edition** was released, the rules faced a [major reworking](#), with the creation of that fine document that are the Comprehensive Rules; this update introduced a system to handle the interaction of continuous effects that - albeit with several tweaks - is still in use today, and tries to hold results that are, in this order:

- univocally determined;
- similar to what a player would intuitively guess;

- akin to the "pre-revisionist" rulings.

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Overview

This system classifies all possible effects in seven categories, known as **layers**, and specifies the order in which these categories should be evaluated. We'll discuss in detail these categories and see what goes in each, since properly dividing effects among them is paramount for correct interpretation of difficult board states.

Other rules specify the relative order of effects within each layer. Generally speaking, effects that provide values usually printed on cards are applied first, then other effects follow in the order they were generated - with an important exception in case they interfere with each other.

The target of this very long set of rules is to order all the continuous effects that could coexist. After doing this, the actual calculation of the results they yield is trivial.

The layers

Each continuous effect belongs in exactly one of the following layers (and, if applicable, sub-layer). If an effect does more than one thing, it has to be split and the single parts applied in the appropriate layers.

1. Copy effects
2. Control-changing effects
3. Text-changing effects
4. Type-changing effects^[2]

5. Color-changing effects
6. Effects that add or remove abilities
7. Effects that alter power and/or toughness
 - 7a. Effects from characteristic-defining abilities
 - 7b. Effects that set power and/or toughness to a specific value
 - 7c. Effects that increase or decrease power and/or toughness
 - 7d. Effects from counters
 - 7e. Effects that switch power and toughness

Copy effects

Copy effects are easy to spot: they *always* use the word **copy**, and *only* these effects use this term. Copy effects have **very specific rules** on what their result will be; at this time, it's important to note that some effects copy an object *with some exceptions*, whereas others copy an object and *then* further modify the copy. The two should not be confused: exceptions to a copy effect are part of the copy effect itself, and are applied with it in the layer 1; further modification go in the appropriate layer. Effects of the first kind can be recognized because they use the word **except**.

Example. *Quicksilver Gargantuan* copies a creature, **except** it's still 7/7. This is a copy effect with an exception, so it's all applied in layer 1. If *Clone* enters the battlefield as a copy of a *Quicksilver Gargantuan* that is copying something else, *Clone* will be 7/7.

Kiki-jiki, Mirror Breaker, on the other hand, creates a copy of a creature and then gives the token haste. If a *Clone* becomes a copy of the token, it will not have haste.



Control-changing effects


These effects change who controls a given permanent. There's not much to say, except that effects that put onto the battlefield stuff under a player's control are *not* control-changing effects.

Example. *Mind Control* changes the controller of a permanent when it's already on the battlefield, so it's applied in layer 2. *Gather Specimens*, on the other hand, causes the creatures it applies to to enter the battlefield already under somebody else's control, so if not handled using the layers system.



Text-changing effects

These effects alter the text of a card, defined as its rules text plus its type line. These effects always use the words **change the text**, and never affect names or mana symbols. Note that abilities granted to permanents are *not* present in their text box, so can't be affected by text-changing effects.

Example. A *Circle of Protection: Black* on the battlefield is targeted by *Mind Bend*. Upon resolution, the devious blue mage changes "black" with "green", which allows him to prevent damage from the menacing *Force of Nature* he's facing. Targeting the mighty Elemental with *Mind Bend* has no effect, since the  cost it requires as an upkeep is not affected.

If a *Pithing Needle* enters the battlefield and CoP: Black is chosen, the mind-bent enchantment can't be activated, since its name was not changed.





If I control a *Benalish Hero* enchanted by *Black Ward*, and you target my creature with *Mind Bend* to change "black" with "green", nothing happens, since granting protection to the Hero does not change its text, but only its abilities. (Targeting the *Black Ward*, of course, will have the intended effect.)



Type-changing effects




All effects that change or grant additional types, subtypes or supertypes to permanents fall in this category. These effects are quite common: several cards alter supertypes (*Leyline of Singularity*), types (*Nature's Revolt*) or subtypes (*Dralnu's Crusade*). They also come with enough rule baggage that we have devoted them a whole page. There are a couple of points that are worth calling back to here:

- If an effect changes a land's type to one of the basic land types, this has the side effect of stripping the transformed land of all abilities printed on it. These abilities are lost in layer 4.

Example. I have a **Yavimaya Coast** enchanted with a **Squirrel Nest** when **Blood Moon** enters the battlefield. Yavimaya Coast loses the abilities generated by its printed text (so I won't be able to add ,  or  to my mana pool) and gains the intrinsic mana ability of Mountains (so I will be able to draw  from it). Since the ability granted by Squirrel Nest will be gained in layer 6 (and it's not generated by the land's text anyway), I will be able to tap it to generate a Squirrel.



- Sometimes, an effect tries to give a permanent a creature type at a time it is not a creature. If this happens, the effect does nothing. Note that we need to evaluate if the permanent is a creature *at the time the effect tries to apply* in the context of the layer system; it's not enough that the permanent will be a creature after all effects have been taken into account.

Example. I activate **Gideon Jura's** third ability to turn it into a creature and attack. My opponent activates **Olivia Voldaren's** first ability to kiss it and turn it into a Vampire (the 1 damage is prevented, but the type-changing effect does not depend from successfully damaging the creature). Gideon is now a Vampire Human Soldier, and my opponent can gain control of it if he can afford to spend , , . At the end of turn, it stops being a creature, so Olivia's effect stops turning him into a Vampire.



Color-changing effects

Guess what? These effects change the color of the affected permanent. Remember that portions of other effects that change colors fall here, and that if you have to choose a color, you must choose from among white, blue, black, red, green and purple. You can't choose stuff like "colorless", "artifact", "Elf", "Tex", and other such frivolities. ,

Effects that add or remove abilities

Effects that say that a permanent **gains** an ability, **has** an ability, or use the word **with** - as in "*becomes a creature with flying*" - are adding abilities to that permanent. Effects that say that a permanent **loses** an ability or make it into a permanent **with no abilities** are removing abilities.

Note that if a permanent has multiple instances of the same keyword ability (redundant or not) and an effect removes that keyword ability, it removes all instances.

Effects that alter power and/or toughness

Since creature combat is the focus of the game, there's a great number of effects that grow or shrink creatures. For this reason, effects that fall inside this layer are not ordered as in [the other layers](#). Instead, they are distributed among five sub-layers; within each sub-layer, the aforementioned rules for ordering apply.

Effects from characteristic-defining abilities

Characteristic-defining abilities are a class of static abilities that's defined very strictly. Those abilities define values that are usually flat-out printed on the card, usually in order to have them vary during the course of game play.

A characteristic-defining ability is an ability that respects *all* the following requirements :

- It **defines a characteristic**, such as color, subtype, power or toughness.
- It's **intrinsic** to the permanent. This means that it's printed on the actual cardboard, granted to a token by the very same effect that creates it, or gained by means of a copy or text-changing effect. The abilities granted by any other mean are not intrinsic, not even when an object grants an ability to itself.
- It **only** affects the characteristic of the object it's on.
- It's not **conditional**. Abilities that work only when some condition is met are not welcome here.

Characteristic-defining abilities have an important property: they work *in all zones*, not only from the battlefield.

Example. *Tarmogoyf* has the iconic characteristic-defining ability: its power and toughness are always equal to the number of card types among graveyards, even when it's on the stack (relevant for [Essence Backlash](#), for example) or in exile (relevant for [Sutured Ghoul](#)). *Nylea, God of the Hunt*'s ability that sometimes turns her into a non-creature enchantment, on the other hand, is not a characteristic-defining ability, since it's conditional. It only works while Nylea is on the battlefield, so she can always be countered by [Scatter Essence](#) and targeted by [Disentomb](#), regardless of my devotion to green.



Effects that set base power and/or toughness

These effects simply state that the base power and/or toughness of a creature become a certain number. These effects are generated by abilities from non-creature permanents that "animate" and become creatures ([Jade Statue](#), [Mutavault](#)), by static abilities ([Humility](#), [Gigantiform](#)), or by resolving objects ([Sorceress Queen](#), [Humble](#)). We don't care about the source: if it sets the values, it goes here.

Effects that increase or decrease power and/or toughness

This layer includes effects that raise or lower power and/or toughness, such as [Giant Growth](#), [Nameless Inversion](#), [Crusade](#), [Mutilate](#), [Looming Shade](#) and countless others.

Example. *Erg Raiders* is enchanted by *Unstable Mutation* and I activate *Sorceress Queen* targeting it. The effect from *Sorceress Queen* is applied in layer 7b, since it sets power and toughness to a certain number; *Unstable Mutation* increases them, so it goes in layer 7c:

7a: -

7b: *Erg Raiders* becomes 0/2

7c: +3/+3, so it becomes a 3/5

7d: -

7e: -

The Erg Raiders ends up as a massive 3/5.



Effects from counters

Counters increase or decrease power and toughness, so there's no reason to segregate them here. I guess we'll just have to deal with it.

Experts only! *Actually, there is a corner case where having +1/+1 counters segregated in their own layer is relevant. It involves a *Phyrexian Ingester* that ate good ol' *Skullbriar, the Walking Grave* - the details are left as an exercise for the reader.*

Effects that switch power and toughness

These effects always use the word **switch**.

Example. *Windreaver* is on the battlefield with a +1/+1 counter on it. Its controller attacks with it, activates its third activated ability twice, casts *Giant Growth* on it and then activates its fourth activated ability, hoping to deal massive amount of damage. After all this stuff resolved, the defending player casts *Humble* on the not-so-humble *Windreaver*. How does it look like now?

We always start by distributing the effects in the appropriate layers, then we apply them on the original object. In this case, they all modify power and toughness, so they all live in layer 7. The counter goes in 7d, the +0/+1 activations in 7c, *Giant Growth* in 7c as well, the switch in 7e and *Humble* in 7b. So:

7a: -

7b: *Windreaver* becomes 0/1

7c: +0/+1, +0/+1, +3/+3, so it becomes a 3/6

7d: +1/+1 from the counter, so it becomes a 4/7

7e: switch, so it becomes a 7/4

The *Windreaver* ends up as a massive 7/4 - probably not what the defending player was hoping to obtain!



Effects that span several layers

Sometimes, a single effect can be divided into smaller chunks, each of which would fall into a different layer. In this case, we treat it as though each portion was a stand-alone continuous effect, with a *very important* difference: once an effect has started applying, all of its parts will apply in the appropriate layer, even if the ability that generated it is removed during the way.

Example. *Natural Emergence* has a static ability that generates a complex effect, that can be divided as follows:

- 4: Lands you control become creatures
- 6: Those creatures gain first strike
- 7b: Their power and toughness are set to 2

Now, let's suppose **Humility** and **Opalescence** are on the battlefield. This notorious combo will make *Natural Emergence* a creature, and *Humility* will strip away its abilities. What do the animated lands look like?

- 4: Lands you control become creatures, *Natural Emergence* and *Humility* become creatures
- 6: Lands-turned-creatures gain first strike, all creatures lose all abilities
- 7b: Lands-turned-creatures' are set to 2/2, *Natural Emergence* and *Humility* are set to 4/4, all creature become 1/1

Since the effect from *Natural Emergence* started applying in layer 4, before being removed by *Humility* in layer 6, all parts of it will apply. Even though in layer 7 its source ability is long gone, it will still apply. The actual results of this derelict situation depends on the order we apply effects in the same layer, which is the matter of the next paragraph.



Order within layers

Layers are useful to sort effects of different nature. However, similar effects fall into the same layer, and we need to establish a way to order those as well. In a pinch, we apply the following rules:

- Effects from **characteristic-defining abilities** are always applied first
- Then, **dependent effects** are ordered so that each dependent effect is applied after all effects it depends on
- Then, independent effects are applied in **timestamp** order

Effects from characteristic-defining abilities

Characteristic-defining abilities are a class of static abilities that's defined very strictly. Those abilities define values that are usually flat-out printed on the card, usually in order to have them vary during the course of game play, and work in all zones, not only from the battlefield. We already talked about them [above](#).

Dependent effects



'Bleach'

Let's suppose you have **Crusade** on the battlefield; then, your devious opponent casts **Celestial Dawn**. Your opponent's creatures are now white, but do they receive the +1/+1 bonus from your Crusade?^[3] After all, they weren't part of the crusade in the first place...

Sometimes, an effect can influence an other, changing:

- the existence of the first effect
- what it applies to
- what it does to any of the things it applies to

If both effects apply **in the same layer**, and neither is a characteristic-defining ability, the second effect **depends on** the first.

Let's provide an example for each of these possibilities:

Example. **Humility** erases the ability on **Lord of Atlantis**, so the effect that gives Islandwalk to Merfolk depends on the effect of Humility that removes abilities, as it changes the existence of the former. On the other hand, note that the effect that gives Merfolks +1/+1 does not depend from the effect from Humility that makes critters 1/1, since they apply in different sub-layers.



Example. *Conversion* turns Mountains into Plains. Then an Island is targeted by *Mystic Compass*, and the artifact's controller chooses to turn it into a Mountain. *Conversion*'s effect will start applying to it, so it depends on *Mystic Compass*'.



Example. *Necrotic Ooze* and *Yixlid Jailer* are on the battlefield, and *Triskelion* is in my graveyard. Applying *Necrotic Ooze* before *Jailer* will not change what *Jailer*'s effect does and what it does it to, so *Jailer* is independent from *Ooze*.

Applying *Yixlid Jailer* before *Ooze* will not change the existence of its effect, nor what it applies to. However, it modifies what *Necrotic Ooze*'s effect does to the object it applies to (*Ooze* itself): instead of gaining *Triskelion*'s activated ability, it won't gain anything, so *Necrotic Ooze* depends from *Yixlid Jailer*.



Sometimes, you may have effect A that depends on effect B, B that depends on C, and C that depends on A. In this case, we have a **dependency loop**, and we apply the Ostrich algorithm:^[4] we outright ignore the loop, and treat these dependency relationships as though they didn't exist.

We now know to tell dependent effects.^[5] We can now use this to order depending effects, and this is how we do it: when an effect depends on one or more other effects, it is always applied after all the effects it depends on.

Timestamp order

When there is no dependency among effects, we simply apply them in the order they were created. This is usually very simple, but we may need a formal definition of the **timestamp** each effect receives. The simplest version of the rule can be laid out as follows:

- The timestamp for continuous effects generated by resolving spells and abilities is the time the source resolved.
- The timestamp for continuous effects generated by static abilities is the time the permanent with the ability entered the zone it's currently in.

Example. A land is both enchanted by **Spreading Seas** and targeted by **Tideshaper Mystic's** ability, choosing Plains. Both effects apply in layer 4, and neither depends from the other, so they are applied in timestamp order. The timestamp of the **Spreading Seas'** effect is the time **Spreading Seas** entered the battlefield; the timestamp of the effect from the **Tideshaper Mystic's** ability is the time the ability resolved.

So, if the land is already enchanted when the **Merfolk's** ability resolves, it will be a Plains; if the ability is activated in response to the **Aura**, it will be an Island. Note that the fact that one effect has a duration whereas the other lasts indefinitely is irrelevant.



There's a couple of juicy side rules regarding effects generated by static abilities:

- If a permanent gains a static ability, the timestamp of the effect generated by that ability will be either the time the permanent entered the battlefield or the time it gained the ability, whichever is later.
- Auras and Equipments^[6] receive a new timestamp when they are moved to a new permanent or player.

Example. The young and eager Kalle has cast an **Argothian Wurm** and a **Shivan Dragon**, but the devious Dave casts a **Mind Control** on Kalle's **Shivan Dragon**. Kalle takes back his monster with **Insurrection**, and swings with both creatures: **Insurrection** has a later timestamp than **Mind Control**, and thus overrides it.

During combat, Dave casts **Aura Finesse** on his **Mind Control**, and attaches it to **Argothian Wurm**. This resets the timestamp of **Mind Control**, and makes it earlier than the timestamp of **Insurrection**, so he gains control of the **Wurm**, which is removed from combat.

Note that he could legally choose the **Shivan Dragon** as a target for the **Aura Finesse**, but since in this case the **Mind Control** wouldn't have actually moved, its timestamp would have stayed the same.



Paralipomena

(Would you believe it's a *real word*? Me neither.)

This set of rules should be applied only to continuous effects that modify *characteristics or control of objects*. These are the great majority of the effects we usually find on cards, but a brief summary of other kind of effects is in order:

- Some effects affect players rather objects, for example granting them protection from something. These effects are applied after the whole layer madness has been handled, according to timestamp and dependency rules. They sort of live in an imaginary eighth layer.
- Some effects modify game rules: for example, they might change the maximum hand size for a player or state that creatures can't be blocked. These are applied after object characteristics have been calculated, according to timestamp and dependency rules.
- Some effects affect the cost of spell and abilities. These effects have **their own set of rules**.

- Some effects are replacement effects, and we talk about them [somewhere else](#).
1. ↑ I think.
 2. ↑ For very large values of type: we include here effects that change an object's card type, subtype, and/or supertype.
 3. ↑ Note that this is *not* an example of dependent effects, since they don't apply in the same layer.
 4. ↑ Which is a *real* technique used in computer science!
 5. ↑ Have a look at [this message](#) on MTGRules-L to understand what it takes to exhaustively tackle the problem.
 6. ↑ And Fortifications, too, you nitpicking completist!

The game in slow motion

Magic has a very tight [timing](#) system: at any given time, it is always perfectly clear which single player can take actions or announce choices, and everybody else must stay silent. We say that the player who is allowed to act has *priority*. Priority bounces back and forth as players sling spells or decline to do so, even though most of these passages are implied. However, for a full understanding of the game flow, it is useful for a fledging judge to slow down the pace of the game^[1] and track priority as it is yielded around.

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But there's more happening among the lines here. [Triggered abilities](#) and [state-based actions](#) fire off *as players receive priority*, roughly at the same time but with *completely different behaviors*. Countless occurrences of these events happen during each game, so it is crucial to master this part of the rules, even though - or perhaps "just because" - they're quick and transparent during game play, except when they aren't.

At last, we will talk about [special actions](#), that are game actions that use a completely different timing than spells and abilities.

1. [↑] In his mind, unless he wants to be abused by every other player involved in the game.

Timing and priority

Magic is a game where players take turns playing lands, casting spells, activating abilities, and responding to various situations. A system of priority is used to determine when a player is allowed to act. When a player has priority, he may do one of three things:

1. cast a spell or activate an ability;
2. perform a special action; or
3. pass priority.

When a spell is cast or an ability is activated, it goes onto the [stack](#) and waits to resolve. When all players in turn order have passed priority without taking a game action, the spell/ability on the top of the stack resolves and players follow the instructions of that spell/ability. If all players in turn order pass priority while the stack is empty, then the game progresses to the next step or phase.

Example. *Let's say that it's my turn and I have just resolved a **Runeclaw Bear** during my second main phase. I receive back priority and choose not to activate or cast anything, so I pass priority to my opponent. Now that he has priority, my opponent casts **Lightning Bolt** targeting Runeclaw Bear.*

*After casting his spell, he still has priority. Satisfied with his excellent play, my opponent passes priority back to me. Unfortunately, I'm out of mana for this turn, so I can't help my faithful bear companion, and I pass priority as well. Since both players passed in succession, the top spell on the stack resolves. **Lightning Bolt** deals 3 damage to Runeclaw Bear, then it's put into my opponent's graveyard.*

State-based actions are checked, so the lethally-damaged Runeclaw Bear is destroyed and put into my graveyard. As I'm the active player, I receive priority again. I pass it to my opponent. My opponent passes as well. Since we both passed in succession and the stack is empty, my second main phase ends and my end step begins.



Note from the example above that a player retains priority after he casts a spell or ability. After a spell has resolved or a phase has begun, priority goes to the active player.

Example. I control **Sneak Attack**, and I want to use it to deploy the massive **Griselbrand** I have in my hand. However, I know that you are holding a **Trickbind**, so if I simply activate Sneak Attack and pass priority, you're going to counter my activated ability and shut off my enchantment for this turn.

However, I can do this: I will activate Sneak Attack, then rather than passing priority I retain it and activate it again. Now you can counter one of the activations, but the second will resolve. Better save that Trickbind for the time I'll activate Griselbrand to draw!



Responding to spells and abilities

One of the main features of **Magic** is the ability for players to act "in response to" the opponent's play. As we said above, after a player casts a spell or activates an ability, the spell or ability will wait on the stack until both players have had a chance to respond. If another player casts a spell, it will go on the stack above the previous one, and so will resolve before.

Example. I cast **Lightning Strike** targeting you, then pass priority. You respond by casting **Cancel** targeting Lightning Strike, then pass priority. I have no response, so I pass priority. Since each player has passed priority, the top spell of the stack, in this case Cancel, resolves. Cancel counters Lightning Strike, so Lightning Strike is moved from the stack to my graveyard. Cancel is then placed into your graveyard, after which I receive priority again.



Triggered abilities

Some abilities are not activated by players, but go off automatically when some condition is met. The game continuously monitors for the trigger event to happen, and then the triggered ability automatically goes on the stack the first time a player should receive priority. We'll discuss triggered abilities in detail [later in this section](#).

Example. I control **Murderous Redcap** and have priority, so I cast **Goblin Grenade** targeting my opponent, sacrificing Murderous Redcap to pay for Goblin Grenade's additional cost. Murderous Redcap goes to my graveyard and its persist ability triggers. At this point Goblin Grenade has been cast and is already on the stack. Before I receive priority again, Murderous Redcap's persist trigger is put onto the stack on top of Goblin Grenade.

I pass priority, and my opponent passes as well. Since both players have passed priority, Murderous Redcap's triggered ability resolves, returning it to the battlefield. Murderous Redcap's enter the battlefield ability triggers. As I receive priority, Murderous Redcap's ability is put onto the stack. Both players pass priority and Murderous Redcap's ability resolves. Both players pass priority again and Goblin Grenade resolves.



Note: Triggered abilities can trigger any time, but they wait to be put onto the stack until just before players receive priority.

No player receives priority during the resolution of a spell or ability, so there's no way to act in the middle of this, unless the spell or ability itself instructs you to do so.

Example. As you resolve **Sundering Titan**'s triggered ability, no player has priority between the time you choose the lands and the time those lands are destroyed, so your opponent can't tap the lands for mana after he knows which lands you choose.



If a player passes priority with unspent mana in his pool, he must announce how much mana is floating. .

Anatomy of a turn

Now let's see some examples of full turns expanded to show all the priority passes. For the following examples we will assume that Adam is the active player and Neilson is the non-active player.

Example. Adam begins his turn controlling **Wake Thrasher**, **Bitterblossom** and **Howling Mine**.

Untap step. Adam untaps Wake Thrasher. Wake Thrasher's ability triggers. As no player receives priority during the untap step, Wake Thrasher's untap trigger is still waiting to be put onto the stack.

Upkeep step. Before Adam receives priority, Bitterblossom's ability triggers, state-based actions are checked, and then any triggers waiting to be put onto the stack are put onto the stack. Adam has two triggers waiting to be put onto the stack (Wake Thrasher's and Bitterblossom's). Adam chooses to put Bitterblossom's ability on the stack first, followed by Wake Thrasher's on top. Then Adam receives priority. Adam chooses to pass priority to Neilson. Neilson responds to Wake Thrasher's trigger by casting **Geistflame** targeting Wake Thrasher, then passes priority. Adam has no response so he passes priority. Since all players in turn order have passed priority, the top spell on the stack (Geistflame) resolves, dealing 1 damage to Wake Thrasher.

Before Adam receives priority, state-based actions are checked and Wake Thrasher, having been dealt lethal damage, is put into its owner's graveyard. Adam then receives priority and passes it. Neilson does the same. Wake Thrasher's trigger resolves and does nothing, since Wake Thrasher is no longer on the battlefield. Adam receives priority and passes it. Neilson does the same. Bitterblossom's ability resolves, and causes Adam to lose 1 life and put a Faerie Rogue token onto the battlefield. Adam receives priority and passes it. Neilson does the same, progressing the game to the...

Draw step. Adam draws a card as a turn action, then Howling Mine triggers. State-based actions are checked and Howling Mine's trigger is put onto the stack. Adam receives priority and passes it and Neilson does the same. Howling Mine's ability resolves and Adam draws a card. Adam receives priority and passes it and Neilson does the same. Since both players have passed priority while the stack is empty, the game progresses to the next step/phase, the pre-combat main phase.



Now that we've walked step-by-step through priority with spells and abilities resolving, let's walk through the remaining phases of the turn with a few abbreviations. From now on, whenever players receive priority it is assumed that state-based actions have been checked and triggered abilities are put onto the stack. Let's see how players pass priority and progress the game from here on.

Example. Pre-combat main phase. Adam takes a special action, playing a **Mountain** from his hand. Adam then casts **Goblin Guide**. Both players pass priority and **Goblin Guide** resolves. Adam then passes priority by saying "Move to combat", Nealson nods. We've now entered the...

Beginning of combat step. Adam says "declare attackers?", thereby passing priority. This is Nealson's last opportunity to use a spell or ability, such as **Blinding Mage**'s tap ability to prevent **Goblin Guide** from attacking. Instead, Nealson just passes priority, progressing the game to the...

Declare attackers step. Adam declares **Goblin Guide** as an attacker. **Goblin Guide**'s ability triggers and is put onto the stack, then Adam receives priority. Both players pass priority and **Goblin Guide**'s ability resolves. Nealson follows the instructions on **Goblin Guide**'s ability, then Adam receives priority. This is Adam's last opportunity to cast a spell before Nealson declares blockers. Adam passes priority and Nealson does the same, progressing the game to the...

Declare blockers step. Nealson declares "no blocks". Then Adam receives priority. This is Adam's last opportunity to take an action before damage is dealt. Adam casts **Giant Growth** targeting **Goblin Guide**. Both players pass priority until the damage step.

Combat damage step. **Goblin Guide** is currently a 5/5 and deals 5 damage to Nealson. Players receive priority. Both players pass priority and we enter the...

End of combat step. Both players receive and pass priority. Note that, during the end of combat step, creatures that attacked this turn are still considered attacking creatures.



Example. Post-combat main phase. Adam casts **Jace, The Mind Sculptor**, then passes priority. Nealson passes priority. Jace resolves and Adam gains priority. Adam activates Jace's +2 ability, then passes priority. At this point, Jace has 5 loyalty, and this is the first opportunity that Nealson has to cast **Lightning Bolt** targeting Jace. Nealson passes priority and Jace's ability resolves. After resolving Jace's ability, Adam activates **Rotting Rats**'s unearth ability, which resolves. Rotting Rats's enters-the-battlefield ability triggers and goes on the stack. Adam passes priority, Nealson responds by casting **Lightning Bolt** targeting Jace, and when **Lightning Bolt** resolves Jace's loyalty is reduced to 2. Now Rotting Rats' ability resolves, and both players choose a card: active player chooses first, then non-active player, then they both discard the chosen card at the same time. Then both players pass priority, entering the ...

End step. The delayed triggered ability from Rotting Rats' unearth ability triggers and goes on the stack. Then Adam gains priority. Both players pass and Rotting Rats' ability resolves, exiling Rotting Rats. Both players pass priority and we enter the...

Cleanup step. Adam discards until he has seven cards in his hand, then damage is cleared from creatures and "this turn" and "until end of turn" effects end. Then state-based actions are checked for the last time in the turn. Players do not normally receive priority during this step; however, if a state-based action needs to be performed or a triggered ability needs to be put onto the stack, the players do so and then players receive priority. If this happens, another cleanup step will follow this cleanup step. After an uneventful cleanup step ends, Adam's turn ends as well and Nealson's turn begins.



Triggered abilities

Triggered abilities are abilities that go off automatically when some event happens - they're never "played" or "activated". It's easy to spot them, since they *always* begin with one of these words:

- at
- when
- whenever

In their basic form, they look like this: **[Trigger event], [Effect].**

Example. *Temple of Silence* has an ability that reads: "When Temple of Silence enters the battlefield, scry 1." This is a triggered ability, since it begins with one of the "magic words" above. The sentence that begins with "When" is the trigger event, the rest of the ability describes the effect of the triggered ability.

Now let's look at *Fabled Hero*: the trigger event is the sentence that starts with one of those words: "Whenever you cast a spell that targets Fabled Hero".

To complete the cycle, we consider *Mogis, God of Slaughter*. "At the beginning of each opponent's upkeep" is the trigger event, "Mogis deals 2 damage to that player unless he or she sacrifices a creature" is the effect.



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- 2 Conditional triggered abilities
- 3 Optional triggers
- 4 Combat triggers
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Pulling the trigger

Triggered abilities have an *interesting* timing. They will trigger *at any time* their condition is met - no matter when or why this happens.

Example. If **Kragma Butcher** is tapped and you untap it with **Hidden Strings**, the ability will trigger, even in the middle of a spell's resolution.



Even though abilities can *trigger* at any time, what happens afterwards is strictly regulated. Let's call to mind the good, old-fashioned mailbox: you can put any mail in the box at any time, but the mailman only picks up the mail once a day. Think of triggers like this: you put them in a box whenever you like, but only take them out when the mailman comes along.



This raises the question of "When does the proverbial mailman come along?", and the answer to this is: whenever a player would get priority, any triggers get put on the stack.

Example. I attack with a **Dark Confidant** equipped with **Umezawa's Jitte**, and my opponent blocks with **Murderous Redcap**. Both creatures deal damage, so Umezawa's Jitte triggers (it puts its letter in the mailbox, in our analogy before); then we apply state-based actions, that is destroy both creatures, so Murderous Redcap's persist triggers as well. Now the active player should get priority - here come the mailman! We put both triggered abilities on the stack at this time, and their order will not depend on which one triggered first. Read on!



If multiple letters arrive, our zealous mailman will sort them by sender. In game terms, this means that if there are several triggered abilities waiting to be put onto the stack at the same time, we determine their order by looking at who controls them: the active player will put all of his triggered abilities on the stack, then the non-

active player will put all of his on the stack above them. Each player will sort their triggered abilities in any way he chooses. This means that triggered abilities controlled by the non-active player will resolve first.

Example. I attack with **Dross Harvester** on my turn, and my opponent blocks with his **Murderous Redcap**, that dies in combat. This triggers the life gain effect from Dross Harvester and Murderous Redcap's persist ability as I get priority. Since it's my turn (I was the one attacking), my triggered ability will go on the stack first, then my opponent's. Assuming nobody has anything to play at this time, my opponent's persist will resolve first and return Murderous Redcap onto the battlefield, ready to ping something for 1. If I had one life to begin with, I'll die with the ability that gains two life from Dross Harvester still on the stack!



Inside the mailbox, each letter has a sender. At the same way, each triggered ability has a controller, that is the player who controlled the source of the ability at the time it triggered.

Example. I cast **Harness by Force** on my opponent's tapped **Pain Seer**. I follow the spell's instructions in order: first I gain control of Pain Seer, then I untap it, which triggers its inspired trigger. Since I was the one controlling it when it triggered, I control the ability on the stack, and I will reveal the top card of my library and add it to my hand.



The process to put a triggered ability onto the stack is very similar to the one we follow to cast a spell, except there are never costs to be paid - if a triggered ability mentions some mana to be paid, the payment happens during the resolution of the ability.

Example. I control **Knowledge and Power** and play **Temple of Epiphany**. As I scry 1, Knowledge and Power triggers. I receive priority and put the triggered ability onto the stack, targeting my opponent's **Brindle Boar**. I don't pay 2 at this time; I yield priority to my opponent, and he activates Brindle Boar's ability, which places it into the graveyard. Knowledge and Power's ability will fizzle, and I won't have the choice to pay the mana or not.



Conditional triggered abilities

Some triggered abilities will trigger off an event only if a specific condition is met at the time the event happens. These abilities follow this template: **[Trigger event], [Condition] [Effect]**. In this template, [Condition] is a sentence that begins with the word **if**, it's always between commas, and immediately follows the trigger event. Technically, the sentence that defines the condition is called an *intervening-if clause*.^[1]

If the trigger event happens at a time the condition is not true, the ability will not trigger at all. Also, as the ability starts to resolve we check the condition again: if it's not true any more, the ability will have no effect.

Example. *Biovisionary* has a triggered ability, as it starts with "At". Between the trigger event ("At the beginning of the end step") and the effect ("you win the game"), there is an *intervening-if clause* ("if you control four or more creatures named Biovisionary"). This ability won't trigger at all at the beginning of the end step if I control less than four Biovisionaries. Moreover, if I control four Biovisionaries and my opponent kills one in response to their triggered abilities, the *intervening-if clause* will not be true anymore as they try to resolve, so they will have no effect.



Optional triggers

Some triggered abilities use the word "may" to give their controller the choice to do something or not. This choice is taken during the resolution of the ability. If one of such abilities triggers, it *will* go on the stack, regardless of whether the player wishes to use the ability, so you *must* choose a target.

Example. *Restoration Angel* has an optional ability. However, what's optional is not whether the ability goes on the stack or not: if there is a legal target for it, it will always go off and ask you to pick one. Let's say the only non-Angel creature you control is a **Phantasmal Dragon**: in this unfortunate case, you will be forced to pick the Dragon as your target, which will cause its "sacrifice me" ability to trigger.



Combat triggers

Some abilities trigger whenever a creature "attacks" or "blocks". These abilities will trigger whenever a creature "is declared as an attacker" or "is declared as a blocker". It won't trigger if that creature enters the battlefield already attacking or blocking.

Example. My opponent controls **Isperia, Supreme Judge**, and I attack him with **Brimaz, King of Oreskos**. Since **Brimaz** is declared as an attacker at the relevant step, **Isperia** will trigger and draw my opponent a card. Then **Brimaz**'s ability will resolve and put an attacking token onto the battlefield; since this creature was not declared as an attacker (it appeared already attacking), **Isperia** will not trigger for it.



This is true for all abilities that trigger whenever a creature "becomes" something, for example "becomes tapped" or "becomes untapped": it is the *transition* between different states that triggers the ability. If an object appears already in that state, the ability will not trigger.

It's important to note that triggers that talk about "attacking", "becoming tapped" or something like it, don't trigger when the object is in the *state* of being tapped etc., but trigger when the object *becomes* tapped, attacking or whatever the trigger is asking about.

Example. If I play a **City of Brass** with a **Root Maze** on the battlefield, it will enter the battlefield already tapped, it won't enter untapped and then become tapped; its ability will not trigger.



Zone change triggers

Abilities that have trigger events involving objects moving zones are called "zone change triggers". When one of these abilities triggers, if it involves doing something to the object, then on resolution it will look for that object in the zone it moved to. If it can't find the object there, then that part of the trigger will fail to do anything.

Example. ***Rancor**'s ability triggers when it's put into a graveyard from play, so it will look for it in the zone it moved to, that is the graveyard. If when **Rancor**'s ability resolves it's not there anymore, for example because it was exiled by **Scavenging Ooze**, it will have no effect.*



Entering the battlefield

Many abilities trigger upon permanents entering the battlefield. Whenever an object enters the battlefield, the game checks all permanents for any triggers *after* the object is already onto the battlefield. This means that continuous effects that modify a permanent's characteristics are taken into account when deciding if an ability triggers or not, and that if several objects enter the battlefield simultaneously, they will "see" one another and trigger accordingly.

Example. *I control **Eidolon of Blossoms** and **Enchanted Evening**. I cast a **Sylvan Caryatid**. As trigger events are checked after the event has happened, and take into account effects that modify characteristics, **Eidolon of Blossoms** will see an enchantment entering the battlefield and trigger.*



Example. *You probably already know this Modern-legal combo: you sacrifice seven lands with **Scapeshift**, and put onto the battlefield **Valakut, the Molten Pinnacle** and six **Mountains**. Since this is a single event (they all enter the battlefield simultaneously), we check for triggers after it's all happened: this is why **Valakut** triggers six times, one for each **Mountain**.*



Leaving the battlefield

Some abilities trigger when a permanent moves from the battlefield to some other zone. This will usually happen because a creature dies, but not *necessarily*. There are two types of these abilities:

- some abilities can *only* trigger when a permanent moves from the battlefield to somewhere else
- some abilities can *also* trigger when a permanent moves from the battlefield to somewhere else, but can also trigger in some other case.

The fundamental difference between these two kinds of abilities is that abilities of the first kind will "look back in time" to check if they trigger or not.

Example. *Reveillark* can only trigger if it's on the battlefield and goes somewhere else, so it belongs in the first group.

Emrakul, the Aeons Torn can trigger if it *dies*, but it can also trigger in some other way, for example if it's discarded, so it belongs in the second group.

As *Reveillark* can only trigger if it leaves the battlefield, the game will check if its ability triggers by evaluating the game state a moment before the event. So if a *Yixlid Jailer* is on the battlefield when *Reveillark* dies, its ability will trigger, as a moment before dying it had the ability.

On the other hand, since *Emrakul* can trigger when it leaves the battlefield but also in other situations, the game will check for triggers by evaluating the state a moment after the event. So if *Emrakul* dies with *Yixlid Jailer* on the battlefield, the game will check for triggered abilities when *Emrakul* is already in the graveyard, and since its ability will be gone by then, it will not trigger.



Experts only! *Permanents leaving the battlefield is not the only case when the game looks back in time, but it's by far the most common. Here's a list of the other cases:*

- *something moves to the hand or library from a public zone*
- *something becomes unattached*
- *a player loses control of something*
- *something phases out*
- *we planeswalk away from a plane*

Delayed triggers

There are some cards that want to have an effect and then set up a "clean up" of that effect. They do this using **delayed triggered abilities**. They still use "when", "whenever" or "at", but not necessarily at the beginning of the sentence. They will be controlled by the player who controlled the effect that created them, and they will only trigger once and then disappear.

Example. The "At the beginning of your end step" is a regular trigger. Its effect will exile **Obzedat, Ghost Council** and set up a delayed trigger to return it to the battlefield. The player who controlled the effect that exiled Obzedat will control that trigger, too. This delayed ability will only trigger once, so if I **Stifle** it, Obzedat will stay exiled forever.



Sometimes, this abilities will refer to a card using a characteristic, usually the type. Even if that characteristic somehow changes between the time the ability is created and the time it triggers, they still apply.

Example. I cast **Time to Feed** on your creature, but you increase its toughness with **Triton Tactics**, so it survives the fight. Since I'm absolutely adamant on killing it dead, I cast **Cytoshape** to make it a copy of my animated **Mutavault** (which will make it a non-animated Mutavault), and then cast **Stone Rain** on it. Even though the object that was destroyed was a land, the delayed triggered ability set up by **Time to Feed** will go off and gain me 3 life.



State triggers

Some abilities trigger on a game state, rather than an event. It will trigger once when that game state is achieved, and will only trigger again after the ability has left the stack.

Example. **Dark Depths**'s last ability uses the state of the card. It triggers once when there are no counters on it, and will not trigger again for as long as it is on the stack - otherwise it would just keep triggering. If this ability resolves, **Dark Depths** will be sacrificed and the ability will not be there to trigger again; however, if the ability is countered by **Stifle**, it will immediately trigger again.



1. ↑ Which you have to admit sounds much cooler than "condition".

State-based actions

State-based actions can be compared to the plumbing we have in our houses: we don't see them, and we don't want to see them; however, we need them to dispose of dirty water.

This is what state-based actions mainly do: watch over the game to spot stuff that needs to be cleared up, and then dispose of it. The game only checks if any state-based actions need to be performed at very specific times:

- Immediately before a player receives **priority**
- As the **cleanup step** begins

If at least one state-based action occurs, the game checks again if other state-based actions are applicable. As soon as all checks are false, the game proceeds. During the cleanup step, players only receive priority if a state-based action occurs or a triggered ability goes on the stack, otherwise the turn ends.

Example. *I control **Scion of Oona**, **Pestermite** (currently 3/2) enchanted with **Curiosity**, and **Briarberry Cohort** (currently 3/3), and my opponent casts **Hurricane** with $X=1$. After Hurricane has resolved, the game checks if there's some state-based action to perform, and sees that Scion of Oona has lethal damage on it.*

Scion of Oona is destroyed, and another check is performed. Pestermite has now shrunk to a 2/1, and still has 1 damage marked on it, so it's destroyed as well. Since this check was positive, another is in order. Now Briarberry Cohort is a 1/1, since I don't control any other blue creature, with 1 damage on it, and Curiosity is not attached to anything: so Briarberry Cohort is destroyed and Curiosity is put into its owner graveyard. These two actions happen simultaneously, so I get to choose the order Briarberry Cohort and Curiosity will end up in my graveyard.

*In the end, I'll have Scion of Oona on the bottom of my graveyard, Pestermite on top of it, and then Briarberry Cohort and Curiosity in the order I chose. Even though no cards dependent on the order of the graveyard have been printed since **Urza's Saga**, older cards used to reference the card on "top" or "bottom" of the graveyard quite frequently, as seen for example in **Phyrexian Furnace**, **Bösium Strip** and many more.*



All the state-based actions are defined within the rules; cards can't introduce new state-based actions.^[1] Here is a list of all the state-based actions, grouped for convenience:

- Waving goodbye to dead players:
 - A player with 0 or less life loses the game.
 - A player that tried to draw from an empty library loses the game.
 - A player with ten or more poison counters loses the game.
- Burying corpses:
 - Creatures with toughness 0 or less are put into their owners' graveyard.

- Creatures with lethal damage^[2] on them are destroyed.
- Creatures damaged by a source with deathtouch are destroyed.^[3]
- Planeswalkers with loyalty 0 are put into their owners' graveyard.
- Tearing tokens apart:
 - Tokens that are not on the battlefield cease to exist.
 - Copies of spells that are not on the stack cease to exist.
 - Copies of cards that are neither on the stack nor on the battlefield cease to exist.
- Unique stuff is one-per-player:
 - If a player controls two or more legendary permanents with the same name, that player chooses one to keep on the battlefield and puts the others into their owners' graveyards.^{[4][5]}
 - If two or more permanents with the world supertype are on the battlefield, all except the most recent^[6] one are put into their owners' graveyards. If there is a tie, they're all put into their owners' graveyards.^[7]
- Weapons and enchantments:
 - If an Aura is attached to an illegal object or player, or is not attached at all, it's put into its owner's graveyard.
 - If an Equipment is attached to an illegal permanent, it becomes unattached from it and remains on the battlefield.
 - If a creature is attached to an object or player,^[8] it becomes unattached and remains on the battlefield, unless it's also an Aura, in which case it's put into its owner's graveyard.
 - If a permanent that's neither an Aura nor an Equipment is attached to an object or player, it becomes unattached and remains on the battlefield.
- Counting counters:
 - +1/+1 counters and -1/-1 counters on the same permanent annihilate each other.^[9]
 - If a permanent has an ability that says it can't have more than N counters of a certain kind on it, but there are more than N counters of that kind on it, all but N of those counters are removed from it.
- Variant games:
 - In a Two-Headed Giant game, a team with 0 or less life loses the game.
 - In a Commander^[10] game, a player that's been dealt 21 or more combat damage by the same general over the course of the game loses the game.
 - In an Archenemy game, a non-ongoing scheme whose triggered ability has resolved is turned face down and put on the bottom of its owner's scheme deck.^[11]
 - In a Planechase game, if a phenomenon card is face up in the command zone, and it isn't the source of a triggered ability that has triggered but not yet left the stack, the planar controller planeswalks.

Note: *Almost all of the state-based actions that move stuff to the graveyard do so without destroying it, so regeneration can't replace this event and abilities that trigger "when [something] is destroyed" don't trigger. However, creatures with lethal damage and creatures with deathtouch damage are destroyed, so regeneration **can** save them.*

Some permanents have indestructible. This means that when we check if state-based actions apply, lethal damage and deathtouch damage are ignored on them. The game doesn't try to destroy them and fail; it doesn't even try.^[12]

All these actions check if something is true *right now*, except two: a player loses if he *was* unable to draw and a creature is destroyed if it *was* dealt damage from a source with deathtouch. We've omitted it for legibility's sake, but these actions only check if the appropriate event has happened *since the last time state-based actions were checked*.

Example. Let's say a player controls a **Platinum Angel** and begins the turn with an empty library. He would lose the game during the draw step, but the Angel prevents it, so he keeps playing he enters his main phase and casts **Rite of Consumption**, sacrificing **Platinum Angel** to it. Now he's not protected by it any more, but even though he tried to draw from an empty library earlier, this didn't happen since the last time state-based actions were checked (that is, when he received priority as his main phase began), so state-based actions don't try to kill him.



State-based effects are not controlled by any player.

Example. I control a **Sacred Ground**, and my opponents **Lightning Bolt**s my animated **Treetop Village**. The Bolt deals 3 damage to it, then state-based actions destroy it. It was not destroyed by a spell controlled by my opponent (it only dealt damage to it, but state-based actions actually destroyed it), so **Sacred Ground** doesn't trigger.



There are some triggered abilities that trigger when the state of the game matches a condition: there are called **state-triggered abilities**, and follow the rules for **triggered abilities**, with some addition. State-based actions and state-triggered abilities should not be mixed up:

- State-based actions only occur at the times specified above. If one of their conditions is met at any other time, they ignore it. When they are to happen, they happen immediately, without using the stack.
- State-triggered abilities monitor the relevant game state at any time, and will always trigger if it's met. However, they use the stack as all abilities do, and can be responded to.

Example. I control **Ancient Ooze** and **Emperor Crocodile**, and cast **Victimize** targeting a couple of creatures in my graveyard. If I sacrifice the Crocodile while I resolve **Victimize**, the Ooze will temporarily drop to a 0/0, then go back to positive toughness as the two target creature cards return to the battlefield. Since state-based actions are not checked during the resolution of a spell, but only as a player would get priority (that is, after the spell is done resolving), the Ooze will stay alive.

On the other hand, if I sacrifice **Ancient Ooze**, **Emperor Crocodile**'s ability will detect that it's the only creature I control, and trigger. After the spell has resolved, it will be put onto the stack as I receive priority, even though I now control two other creatures, and force me to sacrifice the Crocodile.



All applicable state-based actions are performed simultaneously, regardless of the order of the actions that happened before. If this causes the same action to occur more than once, all these occurrences are consolidated into one, so it only needs to be replaced once. For the purpose of applying triggered abilities, the game sees a transition from the state before state-based actions were applied to the state after all have been applied - no partial state exists.

Example. **Greater Basilisk** is blocked by **Gorilla Chieftain**. After damage is assigned, two state-based actions occur: lethal damage and deathtouch damage both try to destroy **Gorilla Chieftain**. The two occurrences of the same action are consolidated into one, and only one regeneration shield is enough to save the Ape.



Example. My **Dusk Urchins**, which has a +1/+1 counter on it, is blocking **Smoldering Butcher**. When damage is dealt, four -1/-1 counters are put on **Dusk Urchins**. Two state-based actions apply: the +1/+1 counter vanishes with one of the -1/-1 counters, and **Dusk Urchins** is put into my graveyard because it has toughness 0.

Both actions are performed; however, the game sees **Dusk Urchins** on the battlefield with four -1/-1 counters and one +1/+1 counter on it before the event, and **Dusk Urchins** in the graveyard afterwards. I will draw four cards.



1. ↑ At least, not yet.
2. ↑ A creature has suffered lethal damage if it has toughness greater than 0, and the total damage marked on it is greater than or equal to its toughness.
3. ↑ As above, this action only occurs if the creature has toughness greater than 0.
4. ↑ If only one of those permanents is legendary, this rule doesn't apply.
5. ↑ Also known as the "legend rule".
6. ↑ The formal definition of recent is: the one that has been a permanent with the world supertype on the battlefield for the shortest amount of time.
7. ↑ Also known as the "world rule".
8. ↑ Usually as a result of a wild type-changing effect.
9. ↑ If there are both +1/+1 counters and -1/-1 counters on the same permanent, N +1/+1 and N -1/-1 counters are removed from it, where N is the smaller of the number of +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters on it. They annihilate each other!
10. ↑ Previously (and also sometimes referred to as) EDH.
11. ↑ Technically, this action looks and checks if "a non-ongoing scheme card is face up in the command zone, and it isn't the source of a triggered ability that has triggered but not yet left the stack", which is almost impossible to parse.
12. ↑ This seems irrelevant, but without this rule the game would immediately try again to destroy them, fail, try again, etc., in an irresolvable deadlock.

Special actions

Special actions are actions that players can take that don't use the stack, so they can't be responded to. Special actions are neither spells nor abilities. They may look like activated abilities, but they don't use the [cost]: [effect] template. Most of them are very rare, involving only very weird cards or old keyword abilities. But there's one special action that is everywhere in a Magic game, and one that's very relevant on the world of Tarkir.

Playing a land

Playing a land is the one special action everybody is familiar with. To play a land, just take it from your hand and put it onto the battlefield. You can play a land during a main phase of your turn if the stack is empty. Though this action can't be responded to, you still need priority to take it, and you regain priority once the land hits the battlefield. Land cards can never be cast as spells.

Usually, you can't play more than one land during each of your turns, but some continuous effects may allow you to play additional lands. To determine if you have permission to play a land, count the number of lands you have played so far this turn, then count the total number of lands you are allowed to play this turn by rules and active effects. If the second number is greater, you can still play another land this turn.

This may be easier to grasp if we use an imaginary variable called "land drop count". Normally, your land drop count is reset to one at the beginning of each of your turns, but some effects may increase it. Each time you play a land, your land drop count is reduced by one. If an effect that increases your land drop count stops applying, your land drop count decreases accordingly. You may never play a land unless your land drop count is greater than zero.

Example. *It's the precombat main phase of your turn, and you control **Azusa, Lost but Seeking**, so your land drop count is three. You play a **Forest**, then cast **Explore**. After it resolves, your land drop count becomes three again. Then you play two mountains, bringing your count down to one. Then, during combat, Azusa leaves the battlefield and its effect vanishes. Now your land drop count is negative! Resolving a second Explore will increase it to zero, so you'll need a third Explore if you want to be able to play another land.*



Some effects may allow you to play lands anytime you have priority. However, no matter what other effects may say, you can never play a land during another player's turn, and you can never play a land if your land drop count is lower than one.

Example. You control **Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir** and you have **Dryad Arbor** in your hand. Thanks to Teferi, Dryad Arbor has flash, so you can play it during your upkeep or in response to your opponent's spells, but you still can't play Dryad Arbor if it isn't your turn, and you can't play Dryad Arbor if you have already played a land this turn.



Some effects, like **Rampant Growth** and **Show and Tell**, let you put a land directly onto the battlefield from another zone without using the word "play". This is not playing a land. It doesn't decrease your land drop count, and the rules and restrictions about playing lands don't apply to these effects.

Turning a permanent face up

Two mechanics (morph and manifest)^[1] allow players to cast spells face down or put card onto the battlefield face down, respectively, and then give them a way to turn them face up: a card played with morph can be turned face up by paying its morph cost, and a manifested creature card can be turned up by paying its mana cost.^[2]

Casting a spell face down and manifesting a card are *not* special actions: you can counter a face down spell just fine, and respond to an ability that tries to manifest a card.

Face down cards and spells are creature with base power and toughness 2/2, and no other characteristics. Notably, this means that they have no name (so a **Bile Blight** or **Maelstrom Pulse** targeting a face-down creature will never affect anything else but its target) and no mana cost, even though you paid 3 to cast it face down (which means a **Spell Blast** with X = 0 will counter a face-down spell, and a **Engineered Explosives** with no charge counters will destroy all face-down creatures).^[3]

Regardless of the way cards end up on the battlefield face down, turning them face up is a special actions. It's not an activated ability, and it's definitely not a spell.

Example. I control a **Meddling Mage** and a **Pithing Needle**, and I named **Akroma, Angel of Fury** for both of them. However, my opponent can cast red **Akroma** face down, as it's turned face down before starting the casting process, and by the time we check if it's a legal play it's already a creature spell with no name. He's also allowed to turn it face up by paying 3, as it's not an activated ability. He can't, of course, cast it face up or activate its "Akroma, Angel of Fury gets +1/+0 until end of turn." ability.



To turn a creature face up, I simply need to show it's front face to other players, determine the cost I have to pay to turn it face up, and pay it. The card immediately becomes face up, without using the stack. I can do this at any time I have **priority**.

Example. My opponent announces that he's turning his face-down creature face up. He shows me a scary **Thousand Winds**, then pays 5. The card immediately becomes a 5/6 Elemental, so I can't respond with my **Shock**. The triggered ability from **Thousand Winds** uses the stack as normal, so I can respond to it by casting **Shock** at my opponent in order to trigger my **Jeskai Ascendancy** and untap my creatures, so they won't be bounced back to my hand.



Example. My opponent casts **Krosan Grip** targeting my pesky **Sensei's Divining Top**, so I can neither activate it to put it on my library nor cast the **Counterspell** I have in my hand. I can, however, turn my **Willbender** face up, since split seconds prevents me from casting spells and activating non-mana abilities, but has no say on special actions. **Willbender** triggers and allows me to redirect **Krosan Grip** to my opponent's **Sylvan Library**.



Hic sunt dracones!

What follows deals with a topic that is very complicated and definitely not required for a judge candidate. If you are studying for your test, we suggest you to skip to the next page. If you are already certified and want to enlarge your knowledge, proceed at your own risk.



Other special actions

Special actions are not a uniform category. They don't all share the same timing rules (however, unless they state otherwise, you can take them if you have priority). They don't use a standard wording. Some have a cost and some don't. All they have in common is they don't use the stack and thus can't be responded to.

Some cards have a static ability that allows you to take a special action related to the effect generated by the ability. For example, **Leonin Arbiter** has an ability that stops players from searching libraries, but a player can ignore the effect for a turn by paying 2. Paying this cost to ignore the effect is a special action that doesn't use the stack. You may take this special action if you have priority. Be very careful: you can't take this action in the middle of the resolution of a spell or ability, so make sure to pay the mana before starting to resolve your **Rampant Growth**!

Some cards have the suspend keyword, that lets you pay a (usually cheap) cost to take a card with suspend from your hand and exile it with some number of time counters. You may only take this special action if you are allowed to begin casting the spell from your hand. Then, after a fixed number of turns, you'll get to cast the spell ignoring its mana cost!

Just for fun and curiosity, here is a list of other cards that involve special actions:^[4]

- **Circling Vultures**
 - **Channel**
 - **Glass Asp**, **Nafs Asp** and **Sabertooth Cobra**
 - **Guardian Angel**
 - **Dominating Lich** and other liches
 - **Quenchable Fire**
 - **Damping Engine**, **Lost in Thought** and **Volrath's Curse**
1. ↑ And a bunch of stray cards such as **Illusionary Mask** and **Ixidron**, that we'll gladly pretend not to exist.
 2. ↑ Also, a manifested card can be turned face up by paying its morph cost, if it has one. Note that if you happen to manifest a non-creature card with morph, such as **Lumithread Field**, you can *only* turn it face up by paying its morph cost, as only manifested *creature* cards can be turned face up by paying their mana cost.
 3. ↑ Note that the ③ you pay to cast spells face down is not a mana cost, it's an alternative cost.
 4. ↑ They're usually old cards with quirky wording.

Judging tournaments

Knowing the rules is only part of what you need to pass the Level 1 test and to judge at your first tournaments - albeit, admittedly, a *big* part. You also need to know the basics of how tournaments are run, and what to do when players make mistakes and need your help to continue their game.

Magic is a complicated game, with players making incorrect declarations, performing actions in ways that are not technically correct, or simply making mistakes and they forget what they have done or are doing. In these instances, it will be your duty to help players to return their game to a correct board state as fast as possible and with mutual satisfaction. While Competitive REL tournaments punish mistakes and foster competition, the Regular REL tournaments you're mainly going to judge should be seen more as organized kitchen table games. These means that the approach to [infractions at Regular REL](#) has to reach a very delicate balance between keeping it fun and keeping it fair.

Magic [tournaments](#) have a very precise structure, but also allow some leeway. In this chapter we'll discuss what is mandatory, what is recommended, and what is left to the organizer's discretion. We'll also discuss the rules for the most common formats you will find at sanctioned tournaments.

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Infractions at Regular REL

Imagine sitting down for round one at your local games store on a Friday night. You're not expected to know every rule, nor do you need to play perfectly. If you make a mistake your friend will probably let you take it back. You don't really mind when you go to a different store that there's a different way of fixing accidentally revealing a card - it's not that important and you just want to have fun.

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Imagine now sitting down for the finals of the Pro Tour. You've studied for months, and you're primed and ready to win. You have to be completely aware of the game situation, as that is part of what is being tested at such a high level. You need to know that if a mistake happens, it will be dealt with fairness, and that the judge helping won't have an effect on the rest of the game or the end result. A judge in a bad mood could cost you the game!

These two different scenarios are why we have different "Rules Enforcement Levels" (RELs). Magic has three RELs, which apply at sanctioned events, and most unsanctioned events in order of least to most competitive: Regular, Competitive and Professional. Each of these defines what should happen when game rules are broken (eg. forgetting to pay an upkeep cost), when human errors are made (eg. drawing an extra card), or players are unsporting (eg. cheating, harassing, or being rude).

The vast majority of sanctioned events are run at Regular REL, and so most judges will only need to have the knowledge and ability required to work at this level. Particularly, Friday Night Magic (FNM), Prereleases and Game Days are always run at Regular REL. As such, rules about Competitive and Professional RELs (contained in the IPG document as discussed below) aren't tested until the Level 2 test.

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The JAR and IPG

There are two documents that define what procedures should be used at Regular and the other Rules Enforcement Levels:

The JAR (Judging at Regular REL) defines the philosophy of what should happen when rules are broken at Regular REL. This document is one that Level 1 candidates need to know. It is written to be simple, and it doesn't specifically outline fixes for every problem, it defines a philosophy of what we should be aiming for when fixing problems.

The IPG (Infraction Procedure Guide) defines the procedures in effect at Competitive and Professional RELs. This document is more complex, and is designed to be much more exhaustive about what should happen if rules are broken. It focuses both on philosophy and fixes that should be applied.

Common issues

Common issues arise when players unknowingly break rules of the game. Players forgetting to draw, or accidentally drawing more than one card; players using the wrong mana to cast a spell; or missing triggers are all Common Issues. Specific philosophies are given here for what you should do, though the general rule is to fix things as best as you can but rulings should never "punish" players, for example keeping mana tapped if they couldn't cast a spell, or making them put back more cards than they wrongly drew. In any case the aim is to teach players the right way to do things, take any corrective action to make the game as fair as it can reasonably be and allow the match to continue naturally.

Unwanted behaviors

Unwanted behaviors are just what they call themselves - things we don't want people doing but aren't serious problems (if they are, then see below). The focus when resolving these is to educate the player, and they can almost always be resolved with a simple chat about the behavior. Examples of this category are tardiness, or asking for strategic advice.

Serious problems

Serious problems are behaviors that are considered threatening to other players or the integrity of the tournament as a whole. Cheating, bribery and abusive behavior are all serious problems. These are treated with disqualifications, and often come with banning from the store or venue (though this is at the sole discretion of the Tournament Organizer, not any judge present).

Common issues

Many players at Regular REL tournaments are either not well-versed in technically correct play, aren't aware of some nuances of certain rules and interactions, or are just prone to sloppiness. Hence, mistakes happen at these events. As judges, we fix these mistakes and educate players as needed. We don't punish honest mistakes harshly.

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- 1 Missed triggers
- 2 Incorrectly seeing hidden information
- 3 Drawing extra cards
- 4 Illegal decks
- 5 Other game errors

Missed triggers

A triggered ability (look for the words “at,” “when,” or “whenever”) is considered missed when the players have moved past the point in the game where it would have a visible impact on the game. Look for anything that requires a physical action or verbal choice: putting a counter on something, choosing a target, changing life totals, etc.

If a trigger is missed, and it includes the word “may”, assume the player chose not to do it.

Example. Amy attacks with *Ajani's Pridemate* and *Child of Night*. Nathan declares no blocks. Amy and Nathan adjust life totals, and Amy passes turn. Amy remembers only after Nathan untaps, draws for turn, and passes the turn back. *Ajani's Pridemate's* trigger is a “may” ability, so we give her the bad news that she forgot.



Otherwise, put it on the stack now, unless it would be disruptive to the game state. This may require some judgment. If game decisions have been made based on the trigger, leave the game state as-is.

Example. Andrew and Natalia are each at 1 life. Andrew controls a **Courser of Kruphix**, and Natalia controls two 1/1 Goblin tokens. Andrew plays the only card in his hand, a Forest, and passes turn without mentioning the trigger. Natalia untaps, draws for turn, thinks for a few seconds, confirms life totals, and attacks with the two Goblin tokens. Then Andrew remembers the Courser trigger and calls “Judge!” Natalia explains that if Andrew had remembered the trigger, she wouldn’t have attacked. We explain to Andrew that significant game decisions have been made based on the trigger not happening, so the trigger is missed.

Now let’s say we’re in a similar situation as above, except both players are at 20 life. Natalia draws for turn, and passes back immediately, upon which Andrew remembers the Courser trigger and calls “Judge!”. A quick evaluation reveals that no game decisions have been made based on the trigger happening or not, so now we have them put the Courser’s triggered ability on the stack.



Players are never required to point out their opponents’ triggers, though they may do so if they wish. This is different from other rules violations, which must be pointed out immediately.

Incorrectly seeing hidden information

Players are human, and human hands can be twitchy sometimes. One of the more common mistakes players make is accidentally seeing cards they’re not supposed to. Examples include drawing for turn and flipping over the next card, fumbling an opponent’s deck while shuffling/cutting, and the dreaded Dead Courser (revealing the top card of your library after your **Courser of Kruphix** dies).

When this happens, have the player re-randomize the portion of the deck that’s supposed to be random. If anything has been manipulated in the deck, make sure to preserve that. For example, if a card has been scryed to the bottom of a library, set that bottom card aside, shuffle the rest of the deck, and put the deck back on top of that scryed card.

Example. Anita casts **Ultimate Price** on Norbert’s **Courser of Kruphix**, his only creature. He puts it in his graveyard, and Anita passes turn. Norbert draws the **Runeclaw Bear** that had been previously revealed to the Courser, and reveals the new on top of his library, a **Forest**. Anita catches it right away and calls “Judge!” We determine that Norbert had previously scryed a card to the bottom of his library from an earlier **Temple of Abandon**. We instruct Norbert to set that card aside (face-down still!), shuffle the rest of his deck, present to Anita for shuffling/cutting, and put the previously scryed card back on bottom of his library.



Drawing extra cards

This happens anytime a player has more cards in hand than they are supposed to have. This can happen for any number of reasons - drawing a card from a **Howling Mine** that's no longer on the battlefield, casting **Jace's Ingenuity** and drawing 4 cards instead of 3, returning a dead creature to hand instead of the graveyard, and so on.

When this happens, determine if any of the improperly drawn cards are known (such as in the case of bouncing a dead creature to hand, or if the card had been revealed via **Courser of Kruphix**). If so, return the cards to their proper zones. Otherwise, determine the number of excess cards, then choose that many cards at random and return them to the top of the player's library (and don't shuffle afterwards).

If this happens at the beginning of a game (often, drawing 7 after taking a mulligan), shuffle the extra cards into the player's deck. The player can then continue to make mulligan decisions based on this new starting hand.

Example. *Aaliyah is playing against Norton. At the end of Aaliyah's turn, Norbert casts **Weave Fate**. It resolves, and Norbert draws three cards. Aaliyah catches it right away, and calls "Judge!" Norbert explains he was momentarily confused, being more used to playing **Jace's Ingenuity**. We take one random card from his hand and put it back on top of his library, and instruct them to continue playing.*



Illegal decks

Sometimes a player shows up to FNM with a pile of 90 cards cobbled together from a collection of hand-me-downs from an older sibling. Sometimes Standard rotates and a player doesn't realize that **Giant Growth** wasn't reprinted in the most recent Core Set. Sometimes a player doesn't realize that just because the **Demonic Tutor** from Liliana Duel Deck is printed with a modern border, that doesn't necessarily make the card Modern legal.

When this happens, look through the deck, and take out any cards that are illegal for the format. If the deck is short, add basic lands of the player's choice to fill it out. Re-randomize the deck (see above) and have the players continue playing. In some cases, a player's deck will be almost completely unplayable after removing the illegal cards (for example, if a player brings the aforementioned Liliana Duel Deck as-is to a Standard FNM). If this happens, work out a creative solution with the tournament organizer (such as refunding the player's entry fee or allowing the player to continue with a loaner deck).

Another common problem is a player scooping up an opponent's card into their deck (typically, **Pacifism** and **Mind Control** effects). If this is caught mid-game, return the card to its owner's library, and re-randomize both players' decks. Encourage the players to count out their deck/sideboard before each game.

Example. After taking a mulligan, Andrew draws a new hand of 6 cards. It contains a **Silkwrap**, four **Plains**, and a **Runeclaw Bear**. He calls “Judge!” immediately. He explains that he’s playing mono-white, and the **Runeclaw Bear** belongs to Nina, his previous opponent. We take the **Runeclaw Bear** out of Andrew’s deck, and have him draw another card and make mulligan decisions based on that hand. Meanwhile, at another table, Nina and Andre are already on the third turn in game one of their match. We return the **Runeclaw Bear** to Nina’s library, and re-randomize it (preserving the card that she scryed to the bottom of her library from a turn-one **Temple of Abandon**).



Other game errors

Sometimes, something else happens in the middle of a game that isn’t covered above. Often, the least-disruptive option is to leave the game state as-is, after applying state-based actions (fixing anything currently illegal in the game, like a player controlling two planeswalkers of the same type, or an Aura attached to an illegal permanent).

If a player forgot to draw or discard cards, have him/her do so now. If fixing the error is simple and straightforward, do so.

Example. At the end of Ajani’s turn, Nicole casts **Sultai Charm** with the “draw two, discard one” mode. It resolves, and she draws two cards, but forgets to discard a card. She untaps and draws for the turn. Ajani stops her then and calls “Judge!” and explains what happened. We have Nicole discard a card now, and instruct them to continue playing.



If the error was caught quickly, consider a simple rewind. This involves reversing all actions done after the error was caught - untap anything that was tapped, adjust life totals to what they were before, undo card draws by returning random cards from the player’s hand to their library, etc. If the rewind seems complicated and/or disruptive, involving reversing many actions, rewinding through complex decision trees, rewinding through shuffles or revealing of hidden information, then leave the game state as-is.

Example. *Alesha attacks Norin with a 5/5 Wurm token. Norin blocks with a **Darksteel Citadel** enchanted by **Ensoul Artifact**. Norin puts the Citadel and Ensoul Artifact into his graveyard. Alesha plays a **Forest**, casts a **Runeclaw Bear**, and passes turn. Norin untaps his four **Islands**, and then they both realize that the **Darksteel Citadel** shouldn't have died, and call "Judge!". We determine that a backup is feasible, so we undo all actions in reverse order to the point of the error: re-tap Norin's four **Islands**, Alesha returns the **Runeclaw Bear** to her hand, untaps the two **Forests** she tapped to pay for the **Runeclaw Bear**, return the **Darksteel Citadel** and **Ensoul Artifact** to the battlefield, and reattach them. Play resumes from Alesha's Combat Damage step.*

*On the other hand, let's say we are in the same situation as above, but they don't catch the error until after the following happens on Norin's turn: Norin casts **Ornithopter**. Alesha casts **Naturalize** on **Ornithopter**. Norin casts **Negate** on Alesha's **Naturalize**. **Negate** resolves. Norin sacrifices a **Polluted Delta** to fetch up an **Island**, and casts **Treasure Cruise**, which resolves. Norin draws three cards, and attacks with two Thopter tokens. Alesha casts **Windstorm** for $X=1$, which meets with another **Negate**. Alesha takes two damage, and Norin draws a card from his **Thopter Spy Network**. Then Norin wonders why he didn't attack with his Ensouled **Darksteel Citadel**, realizes his mistake, and calls "Judge!" After taking a minute to allow the players to explain the sequence of events, we quickly realize that way too much "stuff" has happened to rewind through (including life total changes, permanents changing zones, instant-speed effects, card draws, and a search & shuffle effect), so we leave the game state as is.*



Unwanted behaviors

The main purpose of Regular REL events is to entertain players and help them socialize, with a less strict view on mistakes and without the worry of penalties. This doesn't mean that, as judges, we have to accept every kind of behavior. Rather, there are some mannerisms or attitudes that could reasonably ruin the atmosphere of the tournament, and our duty is to discourage them.

Our main goal at these events is to **educate players**. There are five broad categories of unwanted behaviors and should be avoided. Remember that if you feel like a player is ignoring your efforts to direct him towards a correct attitude, you can penalize him with a Game Loss.

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Taking unreasonable amounts of time

Fifty minutes sounds like a lot of time to play three games of **Magic**, but sometimes that is not enough time to complete two, sometimes even just one. This often happens when a game goes through a series of complex situations or difficult decisions, or when a player uses a deck they are not very familiar with. Of course, we can't say to a player "Please, use another deck", but we still need to be sure that our players are using their fair share of time to decide their next move or their sideboarding choices after the first game.

If we do notice such behavior, we can politely ask that player to play faster, explaining to them that those fifty minutes belong to both players, and it's really important that both of them have enough time to think and act upon their choices. Usually, it's advisable not to interrupt a player while they are thinking: wait for them to make their move, and then advise them that they've used too much time and that they need to play quicker. However, sometimes a player is simply "on tilt" and thinking in circles, you can notice this because they repeatedly look through graveyards, count lands, count cards in hand, over and over. In this case, it's better to break their train of thought to help the player reach a decision.

It's a good idea to mention during your initial announcement that players are expected to play fast, as we all like to finish the event in time.

Tardiness

Magic tournaments have well-defined time limits. This is to ensure all players have the same amount of time in a match and to define clearly when the event will end. A delay in a single table can have the entire event delayed, because we have to give extra time too many times.

Time is a precious resource shared by players and staff and must be treated with care and respect. In stores, it's quite common that players can be late: maybe they are having a chat with friends, or perhaps they want to buy something and are waiting their turn at the checkout. To prevent these problems, make sure that the start time of the next round is well indicated: announce that you posted pairings with a loud voice, remind everyone that the round is about to begin and be vigilant in the venue to immediately help players still not seated.

If a player arrives late, take them to their table and explain to them quickly why it is important to be right on time, and request the player to not be late again. Then give that match a time extension equal to the amount of time passed since the start of that round. Of course, there's a limit to our patience! If a player arrives to their seat with ten minutes of delay or more, there's no chance to fix the problem: giving so much extra time would have unacceptable repercussions to the whole event. For this reason, if a player has not shown up after ten minutes we assume they're not interested in playing their match, and the opponent is automatically declared as the winner, with a score of 2-0.

When a player fails to show up, drop them from the event. It's actually quite common for players to simply leave without telling a judge. If the player ultimately reports to you before the round ends, undo the drop if they're still interested in the event.

Inadequate shuffling

A deck is shuffled when it is sufficiently randomized, when a player can't possibly know the position or distribution of one or more cards in their deck. If even the position of a single card is known, the deck is not considered to be randomized. Virtually in every card game, the deck must always be randomized, because "chance" is part of the game itself.

Knowing the card that we are going to draw is an enormous advantage, so much so that there are spells and abilities that grant it. Therefore, shuffling your deck is extremely important, and must be done in a proper way every time the game instructs you to do so.

Educate players that shuffling their deck just a couple of times is not sufficient, and that pile shuffling is not actually shuffling at all. It's quite common that players are not very diligent in shuffling, because this is a repetitive action made many times during a game, and the perception is that doing it over and over steals time from the "real" match.

If you see a player acting shuffling insufficiently, step in and ask them to shuffle their deck better, using at least six or seven riffle shuffles. Let them know that this action is not a waste of time but it's totally the opposite: the game will benefit from it. Giving this advice during the initial announcement could help in reducing the problem.

Asking for or providing strategic advice

Magic is a game designed for one-on-one matches. Two players compare their skill in order to win a game. The player who has the deepest understanding of strategy and rules has more chances to defeat their opponent.

That's why no other person is entitled to intervene in a match. Sometimes people think that it's not such a big problem to help a player in calculating power and toughness of one of their creatures, or combat damage, or deciding which card to pick up during a draft. They think they are simply reducing the dead times of the game. This is completely wrong. Magic is a complex game, to play and to observe. It's acceptable that a player

couldn't have notice some details of the current game state, making wrong decisions about it. This is part of the game itself. Therefore, if a spectator points out a single detail of a match they're watching (even if they think it's an obvious one), they can change the entire course of that game or ruin strategies built over turns.

For the same reason, a player involved in a match or a draft can never ask for help to make their decisions. They must try to win counting only on their own skills, not counting on the combined skills of those spectating.

This kind of behavior is, unfortunately, really common, especially if many players in a tournament are friends or know each other well. As usual, remember this during the initial announcement. If necessary, remember it at the beginning of each round.

Be aware of the crowds too! If a group of spectators is watching a match, stay nearby, prevention is the best solution as sometimes their casual chatter can unintentionally give unwanted advice. If you arrive too late, kindly ask all spectators to be quiet from that moment on, in order to have players play their match with no interruptions. If the problem persists, remind them that you could be compelled to remove these talkative people from the area.

There's only one exception to this rule: during the deck building portion of a Limited tournament, players are encouraged to help each other. Be an example for them and be the first to do so! Also some formats involve multiple players working together and they can provide advice, but those are multiplayer games and have their own rules.

Note: *When a spectator spots a rules mistake in a game, as opposed to a strategical error, they're supposed to stop the players and call a judge. However, many players will just tell the players and correct the mistake. This is sort of OK: thank the player, ask them to involve you the next time it happens, but don't be too harsh, otherwise they may not do anything next time!*

Making another player uncomfortable

If a player gets angry, or insults his opponent but without being overly aggressive, a little talk should be enough. They will usually understand why this behavior is not acceptable.

Example. *A player, after losing a match due to a topdeck, says to their opponent: "You are so fu****g lucky, a****le!"*



In some communities it may happen that this kind of behavior is common and accepted by all members, who insult each other, and they still have a joyful experience and are close friends. Even if it will not be easy, be sure

to educate those players, because any new player approaching their community will feel uncomfortable and also, that community approaching another play environment could have problems. So remember that the same kind of conduct should be treated the same way in any community.

Remember that if a player ostensibly ignores your requests to correct their behavior, you can reinforce your education efforts with a Game Loss penalty.

Conclusion

Keeping an eye on these behaviors is an important part of our job: educating players to prevent bothersome and deleterious attitudes helps all participants to enjoy the event and to have a positive experience.

As a general rule, if your verbal warnings aren't effective enough and a player continues any of these behaviors, you have an "extra tool" to use: you can issue them a Game Loss. Keep in mind that a player disregarding your instructions is the only circumstance you are allowed to do it.

A Game Loss is one of the only penalties used at Regular REL (the other being disqualification), and must be used only when every other attempt to solve the problem has failed. With applying this penalty, you'll emphasise strongly on how it's important to follow what you said before and how much player's cooperation is required.

If you suspect that a player is violating rules willingly, or if the situation is escalating and that person is changing their behavior to an aggressive mood, then this situation must be managed as a Serious Problem.

Serious problems

Some actions or behaviors are so disruptive for the community and the game itself, that they cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. Our goal is to *prevent* players from committing these actions, but if they do, we have to remove them from the tournament. Remember that all players should be treated the same way, no matter the age or experience they have.

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Aggressive behavior

We want all tournaments to be a joyful experience for all players. Some players can be stressed or angry about the outcome of a match. This is not an acceptable excuse for a behavior that can spoil the experience for everyone else.

Directly insulting another player

If a player insults their opponent by their color, race, gender or religion, you should remove the player from the tournament and report them following: [Disqualification Process](#), then have a *firm* talk with them and make sure that they *never* do it again. Be sure to make them understand that it's not *you* who impose this conduct, but that this conduct has a very negative effect on people around them.

Example. *A player, very angry about the outcome of the tournament, tells their last opponent: "Females should not even play magic, you are just a lucky sl*t who does not even know how to play!"*



The most important thing is to make the offended player confident that this will never happen again and that they can rely on you to stop such behavior.

Violence or threats

If a player becomes aggressive, makes people around them feel threatened or in danger, or harasses another player, you should remove them from the tournament too. You should also have a talk with the tournament organizer who can remove them from the venue. *Do not* try to remove them from the venue yourself if they're not willing to go away.

Example. *Here are some situations where removing the player from the event is advisable:*

- *A thirteen year old boy tells his opponent that he will punch him in the face if he plays another Counterspell.*
- *A player throws his deck at his opponent.*
- *A spectator tries over and over again to convince a player to go on a date after being refused, even if the offended party was very clear with them, asking them to stop.*
- *A player slaps another player's back.*
- *A fifteen year old girl physically kicks another player.*
- *A thirty year old experienced player hits another player's backpack.*



As you can see in the examples, who acts unacceptably is not relevant. Being male, female, new to the game or an experienced older player doesn't make a difference. Also notice that insisting with the same kind of unwanted behavior after being warned is not acceptable and that harassment is a serious problem, just like being aggressive.

The best way to prevent these kind of situations is to have a chat with problematic players *before* they cross the line, possibly in a moment in which they are not angry. If we are not able to prevent the problem, our priority is to calm the players and defuse the situation, not to give them a penalty.

Cheating

A player is cheating if they intentionally break a rule or lie to a judge in order to gain an advantage. Sometimes players come to the tournament with the intention to cheat, but more often they just seize the opportunity on the fly.

Planned cheating

Planned cheating usually happen as a manipulation of one's or the opponent's deck during a shuffle.

Example. *Alex, while shuffling his opponent's deck, he looks at the bottom card and makes sure to float it to the top if it's a land, in order to mana flood the opponent.*



This is a clear example of cheating. A player manipulating their opponent's deck. But there are other ways, more commonly used, to increase our chances of good draws!

Example. *Johnny divides all lands from spells, than puts them together alternating two spells with one land. After this process, he shuffles his deck for five seconds, and presents it to his opponent. When asked about this procedure, Johnny says that he does not want to draw all lands, and mana weaves to avoid it.*



In this example we have a player trying to improve his draws via manipulation of his deck. This is cheating. Stacking the deck this way is legal only if you shuffle it enough times afterwards, but if you shuffle it enough, there is no point in stacking it, because it will not give you any benefits. So there is never a good reason to mana weave.

Opportunity cheating

This kind of cheating is much more common than planned cheating. Many players notice a game rule violation they or their opponent did, and don't point it out because they will get an advantage from the situation.

Example. *Joker attacks with a **Wall of Fire**. Batman notices that it has defender, but says nothing because he really wants to cast his **Swift Reckoning**.*



Notice that here Batman is the one cheating, even if Joker is ~~the evil one~~ the one violating the rules! Batman noticed an error and did not point it out because it could give him an advantage. This is cheating. Joker could be cheating too, but only if he noticed defender and ignored it on purpose. He is not cheating if he just forgot the wall has defender.

Lying

Sometimes a player lies to us, usually in order to avoid a penalty.

Example. *John forgot to remove the **Black Knight** he sideboarded last match, but he is very tired and does not notice it. We are at the table, and we are sure that he does not play Black Knight main deck. When we ask him, he notices his mistake, but since he really wants to continue playing his match, without anyone bothering him, he tells us that he is playing it main deck.*



Example. *We suspect that Alex missed his own **Dark Confidant** trigger on purpose, because he was at one life. We ask him some questions, and we ask him if it happened to him to forget the trigger before. He feels that if he gives a negative answer it will not put him in a good shape, so he tells us that in that same match he forgot the trigger many times. It comes out that it was the first time he forgot that trigger, so he lied to us. Even if it is still possible that he did not forget the trigger on purpose, he lied, and his intentions about lying are clear.*



Example. *Antonidas has some extra cards in his sideboard. We ask him why, and he tells us that his friend Sylvanas traded him these cards today and he had nowhere else to put the cards. These card are very strong in his sideboard so we are not fully convinced by his version and we go to ask Sylvanas. She tells us that she did not trade any cards today because she left her trade binder at home. Antonidas was clearly lying, so we need to disqualify him.*



As you can see in the examples, sometimes lies are a little more innocent than others, but when we investigate we need players to tell the truth, so disqualification is always the correct penalty.

How to spot cheating

Cheating can happen without anyone noticing, and will usually appear as normal game errors. Asking some details to players who happen to gain big advantages from their own mistakes is a good way to check if something shady is happening. Go a little deeper if their version does not seem realistic and you will happen to have many different versions of the same thing by the same player!

Experts only! *Catching cheaters is hard. Try not to become obsessed and see cheaters everywhere! If you're interested in useful investigation techniques, you can read these excellent articles by Eric Shukan: [The Search for Collateral Truths - Part 2](#) - [Part 3](#)*

Bribery and wagering

Offering incentives in exchange for a concession or a drop, and betting on any portion of a tournament is strictly forbidden.

Example. *Here are some examples of this behavior:*

- *A player offers his opponent a card he owns in exchange for a concession.*
- *A spectator bets \$1 on a player skipping his third land drop.*
- *Two players are on the last additional turn of the last round of Swiss and their match is going to end in a draw that will leave both players out of top 8. One player asks the other to concede in exchange of half the prices they will eventually win during top 8.*



We want players to play **Magic** at our tournaments. Betting on something that happens during a tournament gives spectators a really bad image of the game and the community. Magic is a game for children (13+) and adults. Gambling is much different and it is only for responsible adults. We never want people to look at Magic

like they look at gambling, in many countries there are strict rules for gambling and Magic could be banned if it's considered gambling.

Also, we prefer it if the winner of our events is determined by games of **Magic**. We can't (for practical reasons) forbid a player to concede, but we must stay vigilant that nothing is offered in exchange. If two players agree on a concession in exchange for any kind of reward, all other players in the tournament are affected, especially the one that will end up ninth!

Please note that it is legal to ask for a split, and after it has been accepted by the opponent, conceding or asking for a concession. The problem comes when the two are connected.

Example. Jack: "This has been such a long and challenging tournament! It will be a shame if neither of us wins anything. Would you like to split any prize we eventually win?"
Norman: "Yes, why not!" Jack: "Oh great! I will concede."



In this example what the two players are doing is perfectly legal.

Experts only! For more examples and a full explanation of what is or is not legal, you can read this old but gold article written by Sheldon Menery: [FINAL JUDGEMENT: Concessions and Prize Splits](#)

Rolling a die

Using any method other than playing **Magic** to determine the winner of a match is forbidden. This usually takes the form of two players rolling a die to decide who will win their match, but *any* random method is forbidden.

Example. Here are some examples of this behavior:

- Two players are on the last additional turn of the last round of Swiss and their match is going to end in a draw that will leave both players out of top 8. One asks the other to roll a die to determine the winner.
- Two players are tired and want to go home after a long tournament. One asks the other to flip a coin to determine the winner, so that they can go and have dinner.



Sometimes the result of a match does not help any of the players in their path to victory. Choosing a random winner will give them an unearned chance, removing it from another player who earned their victory by playing **Magic**. We never want this to happen. Being the final or a match between two players who have nothing to win will not change the rules, but we want to be more vigilant on players who actually have chances to win something. It is a good habit to stay nearby top tables at the end of last round since it is the moment when players will be tempted to roll a die or bribe the opponent. Remember that you are there to stop them from breaking the rules, so feel free to step in before something happens: most players don't know or aren't certain on what can and can't be done, and it's better to educate them *before* they say anything.

Theft

This includes stealing goodies from other players, from the venue, and replacing a card in a limited pool.

Example. *A player opens a valuable foil in his pool during a Sealed Deck event, and wants to keep it without dropping from the event. He pretends to drop it to the floor, and then replaces it with a less valuable card.*^[1]



Some players like certain numbers or want to have a memento of a match they've played so take table numbers. This is theft of tournament material and is not allowed.

Let's recap!

A good store judge tries to *prevent* serious problems:

- Spot potential problems in advance:
 - Talk often with players about gaming environment, community, and ask their opinion. They will help you a lot on spotting problems before they become... problematic.
 - Talk with the tournament organizer. They are always in the store and see a lot of things.
 - Look and listen: don't just see the games and the players, don't just hear them, look at them, listen to what they say. Sometimes we just don't look or listen enough to see the signs of something possibly going wrong.
- Prevent future problems with education:
 - Make announcements. Be sure that players know the rules. For examples, many new players don't know that it is forbidden to roll a die to determine the winner of the match. Remind players at all of your tournaments.
 - Be in the right spot at the right time. We stressed some of the situations that can cause problems more often; remind players what to do and what not to do just before they have a chance to do it. Situations with more prizes or rewards are always more critical than others.

- If a problem still happens, deal with it immediately:
 - Talk to the person who caused the problem. If you did everything right, they will understand the situation and feel sorry about it. Disqualify them, and then follow the [Disqualification Process](#) to report the penalty to the DCI.
 - The word "disqualification" is harsh and very loaded. You don't need to use it when you tell a player they are done playing in the event. Tell them that you need to remove them from the event because what they have done has given them too big of an advantage, is not acceptable, or is bad for the community.
 - If you need to remove someone from the venue or the situation is quickly escalating, involve the Tournament Organizer as soon as possible. Never antagonize the player directly.
- i. ↑ This scenario will become obsolete with the [new procedure](#) at Sealed Deck events but is still possible in Drafts.

Tournament rules

In the earliest years of the game, when dinosaurs roamed the Earth and **Black Lotus**es were traded for **Shivan Dragons**, each tournament had a structure of the organizer's liking. While organizing [the first Pro Tour](#), Wizards of the Coast came up with a standard formula that is now codified in the **Magic Tournament Rules**.

In the first chapter of this section we'll discuss [how matches are structured](#): how they start and end, how sideboards are used, and how players can drop from tournaments. The second chapter will describe [the big picture of a tournament](#): how many rounds should be played and how the single elimination portion works. Then, we'll describe briefly how the most common tournament [formats](#) work.

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Match structure

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Starting a match

A **Magic** match starts when the two players sit down facing each other to show their skill with cards. This is the moment after which no external advice can be given.

Each player shuffles his deck so that he can't possibly know the position of any of the cards. It's legal to quickly spread similar cards to avoid clusters in the initial ordering or performing a *mana weave*.^[1] However, after the deck has been manipulated in this fashion, the player must shuffle it very thoroughly, in order to make the initial configuration of the deck irrelevant.

The players then roll a dice or flip a coin to determine who chooses if he wants to play first or draw first. This choice must be taken before looking the first hand; if the player looks at his hand before announcing it, we assume he has chosen to play first.

The first hand will be made up of seven cards, and, in turn order, each player may take **mulligans**, that is to shuffle his hand in his library and draw a new hand of one fewer card.^[2] After a player is satisfied with his hand, if he has less than seven cards in hand he may look at the first card of his library and optionally put it on the bottom of his deck. This is completely optional: if a player forgets to do so, assume he has chosen to keep the card on top.

Playing a game

A game of **Magic** tests the individual skills of each player, so spectators must not interfere with suggestions or *impromptu* rulings. If a spectator thinks the players have committed an infraction, he should not intervene directly; but rather involve judge. The only thing he can tell the players is to stop playing while he fetches a judge, but not *why* he's calling a judge, as this could be a suggestion to one of the players. However, spectators are never *required* to point out infractions - remember that players *are* required to point out infractions, even when the infraction in question benefits them - failing to do so may be a [serious problem](#).

Players should try to communicate clearly, and involve a judge as soon as an infraction occurs or they are not clear on what's going on in the game. Judges are there to help them have an enjoyable experience, not to slap them on wrist when they screw up! Especially at Regular tournaments, the focus of our interaction with players should be to *educate* them, teaching the rules of game and fostering clear communication and good sportsmanship.

If there's only a single judge at the tournament, his rulings are final. Bigger tournaments will have more than one person in staff, in which case one of them will be designated to be the **head judge**. If a player is not satisfied with the ruling received by a floor judge, he's always welcome to **appeal** to the head judge. This should not be felt like an offence by the judge who delivered the first ruling - it's just a tool we have to ensure that all rulings given are consistent. On the other hand, if you see a player is not really happy with your ruling, you can remind him that he has the right to listen to a second opinion, and encourage him to do so.

Players are expected to be respectful of their opponents and the judges. However, remember that there's a difference between *unsporting behavior* and *non-sporting behavior*. Refer to the discussion on [aggressive behavior](#) for further information.

Players may take notes during a match,^[3] and use them to inform their decision. For example, they may write down the name of the bomb played by their opponent to name it with **Infinite Obliteration** during the second game. Players may also bring short notes from home, for example with suggestion on what to side in and out for each match-up, but they can only access this information *between games*.

Players are usually allowed to use smartphones to track life totals and look at the Oracle text of cards, but when they do so they must allow the opponent to look as well, so he can be sure they're not accessing strategic information or reading the text message from the guy that's standing behind them. At REL Competitive, the head judge has the option to completely forbid the use of electronic devices.

Ending a game

A match in a **Magic** tournament consists of a series of game, that ends after a player has won two of these games. Games that end in a draw, for example because a player casts an **Earthquake** big enough to kill both himself and his opponent, do not count towards this score.

However, matches during the Swiss portion of a tournament usually enforce a [time limit](#). When time is up, the *end of round procedure* is performed: after the current turn ends, five extra turns are played.^[4] If a player manages to win the game during the extra turns, the match immediately ends; otherwise, at the end of the fifth turn the current game ends in a draw, regardless of the current life totals of the players.

Experts only! *Matches in the single-elimination portion of a tournament can't end in a draw. These matches are usually untimed, but may have a time limit if the location the hosts the tournament must close at a given hour. In these case, you can enforce a time limit. If time runs out, perform the usual end of round procedure, with the following differences:*

- *If at the end of the fifth extra turn the players are tied in games won (so they're 1-1 or 0-0), the game can't end in a draw. Instead, the player with the highest life total wins. If they have the same life, as soon as one life total changes the game ends, and the player with the highest life total wins.*
- *If a player manages to win the game during the extra turns and this makes the score 1-1, the players will begin a new game, with the following additional rule: if at any time a player has more life than his opponent, he immediately wins the game and the match. Time to side out those **Polluted Deltas**!*

Since matches have a time limit, it's important that both players and judges use this time wisely. If you think a player is [taking too much time](#) to make his plays, you should intervene to correct the problem. On the other hand, if you give ruling that takes more than a minute, give players a *time extension*. This allows you to take all the time you need to do a good job without "eating up" play time; you may consider to tell players that you'll give

extra time as soon as you come to the table and see a complicated situation. Remember to look at your clock, so you know how long a time extension to give!

When the time is up, or anytime before the end of the round, players may agree to end a game or match in a draw or to concede the game to an opponent. This choice must be taken *without* any kind of reward or incentive, otherwise we have a [serious problem](#) to deal with.

Dropping from a tournament

Sometimes the luck is not from our side, and we decide we have better things to do than keep on playing with this terrible Sealed pool. A player can **drop** from a tournament at any time, simply informing the judge before the next round is generated. If the dropped player later decides that they want to reenter the event, they can do this, even if they skipped some rounds.

Just like with concessions and draws, inducing a player to drop via an incentive or a reward is not allowed.

Sideboarding

In Constructed tournaments, players can have up to fifteen cards in their sideboard. In Limited events, a player's sideboard consists of all the cards in his pool that he is not playing in his deck. In both cases, a player may look at his sideboard at any time, but the cards must remain separated with the other ones in the game.

In Constructed events, after a player has exchanged cards with his sideboard, the deck and the sideboard must still be legal - that is, at least 60 cards in the deck and no more than 15 in the sideboard. Normally, as players have a 60-cards deck and a 15-cards sideboard, this means that they need to exchange cards on a one-per-one basis. However, if they have more than 60 cards in their deck and less than 15 in their sideboard, they have a bit more leeway. In any case, they are still *required* to return the main deck to the original configuration when they sit down for the first game of each match.

In Limited events, players can alter their deck how much they want, as long as they end up with a 40-cards main deck. They may also ask for any number of basic lands to add to their sideboard at any time. At Regular events, players can start a match with an altered main deck - is known as *continuous construction*. The tournament organizer may decide not to use continuous construction, to give players an experience closer to that of a Competitive event, but this must be clearly announced before the event begins.

Information

At Regular events, all information that is not *private* (that is, the content of a player's library, hand and sideboard, and the identity of face-down cards) is considered *free*. This means that, if a player asks a question, the opponent is required to answer in a honest and complete fashion. If a player can't answer a question, perhaps because he is not sure of the answer himself, a judge should be involved as soon as possible.

In addition to that there are some information that must be announced upon change and physically tracked by the affected player. These informations are called *status information* and consists of:

- life totals
- counters a player has attached to them (like energy counters, poisons counters, etc)
- effects like City's Blessings, Monarch.

Note that Competitive events are regulated by a different set of rules, that you can find in [chapter 4.1 of the Magic Tournament Rules](#).

1. ↑ A mana weave consists in this: you separate lands and non-lands, and then order your deck to have one land-two spells-one land-two spell and so on.
2. ↑ Players announce their intention to mulligan in turn order, and if both decide to mulligan they do so simultaneously.
3. ↑ But *not* during the draft of a Limited tournament.
4. ↑ This means that one of the player will have three more turns, and the other will have two. **Time Walk** effects *do count* in this respect, which means you can use to "steal" a turn from your opponent.

Tournament structure

Events can be divided into two categories: casual and sanctioned events.

Casual events can be run in any way that tickles your fancy: you can use official formats, unofficial formats or even come up with your own formats. Casual events only award a single Planeswalker Point, so there's no need to register anything more than the list of players on Wizards Event Reporter. Obviously, feel free to use it to assist you with pairings and standings.

Sanctioned events award some number of participation Planeswalker Points to all players, and then extra points for wins and draws. This number is increased for Competitive events. You can find a detailed explanation [on the Mothership](#).

The following rules only apply to sanctioned events. Some of these rules are *recommendations*: this means that you're suggested to do so at Regular REL, but required to follow them at Competitive REL.

Minimum requirements

An individual (non-team) event must have at least eight players and at least three rounds in order to be sanctioned by the DCI. A team event must have at least four teams and at least two rounds to be sanctioned. Events with less than this number of players can be run, but must be unsanctioned and do not provide Planeswalker Points for their participants. (Or you can cancel it and run a Casual event instead.)

Tournament officials (i.e. the tournament organizer and the judges) may play in any Regular REL events they are judging, such as Friday Night Magic and Prerelease. They cannot play in events they run at Competitive REL, like GP Trials and Preliminary PTQs.

Announce how many rounds there will be before the beginning of the first round. Once announced, the number of rounds for the entire event is set, even if players are added or dropped from the event after the announcement.

The MTR recommends the following number of rounds based on the number of players or teams. You may deviate from this recommendation for Regular events, but you are required to follow it strictly for Competitive events:

Number of players	Number of rounds	Playoffs
8	(single-elimination)	Top 8
9-16 (Limited)	4	Top 8
9-16 (Constructed)	5	Top 4
17-32	5	Top 8
33-64	6	Top 8

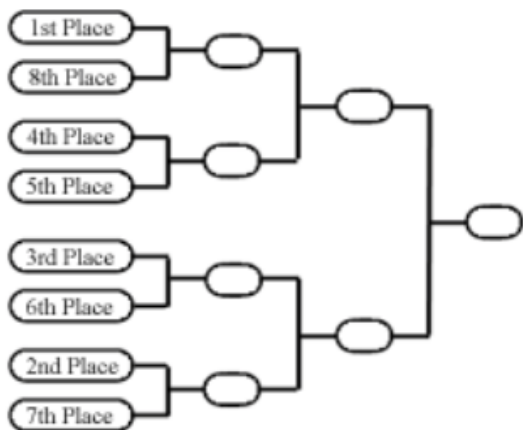
Tournaments with 8 players should be run as single elimination and have no additional playoffs. Beyond this, playoffs are always optional at Regular events: you are always free to end the event and distribute prizes at the end of Swiss rounds.

Tournaments with 9 to 16 players have a different number of rounds recommended for Limited and Constructed events: four rounds + top 8 for Limited, and five rounds + top 4 for Constructed. This allows the top 8 of Limited events to be played as a Booster Draft rather than using the same decks as the Swiss portion. You *can* however play the top 8 portion of a Limited event with the same decks at Regular events, but you are required to have a top 8 Booster Draft at Competitive.

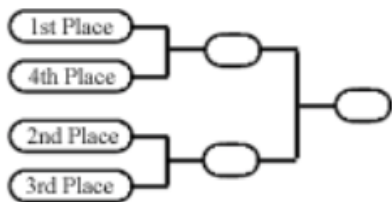
Pairings

Generally, tournaments use the [Swiss pairing algorithm](#) with a few modifications to determine players' pairings. Players with the same number of points are paired randomly, except in the last round when tie-breakers are used to pair.

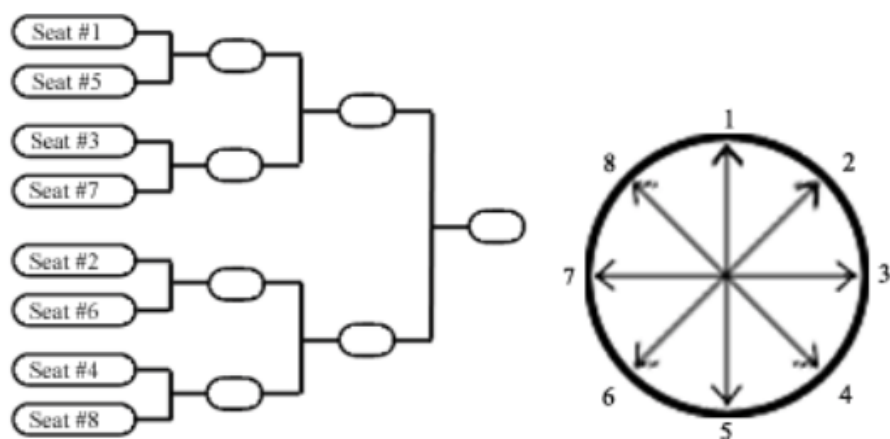
After the Swiss rounds are completed, some tournaments proceed to a single-elimination playoff. In the playoffs of Constructed tournaments and Sealed Deck tournaments (without a single-elimination booster draft playoff), players should be paired by their rankings after the final round of Swiss. An eight-player playoff should be organized like this:



Similarly, a four-player playoff should be organized like this:



For tournaments with a single-elimination Booster Draft playoff, the top eight players should be seated *randomly* around a table to conduct the draft. Then each player plays the player opposite them (or four seats away if not using a round table). Eight-player draft pods are also seated and played this way.



Time Limits

The required minimum time limit for all matches is 40 minutes. Don't drop under 40 minutes for any circumstance. The recommended times are:

- Swiss rounds: 50 minutes
- Single-elimination quarterfinal or semifinal matches: 90 minutes
- Single-elimination final matches: no time limit

Limited events have additional time limits for deck registration and construction:

- Sealed Deck:
 - 20 minutes for deck registration
 - 30 minutes for deck construction
- Booster Draft:
 - 25 minutes for deck registration and construction

Players must wait for the officially tracked time to begin before starting their matches. They can however shuffle and present their decks and resolve mulligans in advance.

Formats

Formats define which cards you can use in your deck at a given event. There are two big families of formats: Constructed and Limited. In Constructed tournaments, you build your own deck from home, made with cards you own from your collection; in Limited tournaments, you can only use cards in a sealed product pool provided at the beginning of the event.

Contents

- 1 Constructed
 - 1.1 Standard
 - 1.2 Modern
 - 1.3 Legacy and Vintage
 - 1.4 Pauper
 - 1.5 Commander
 - 1.5.1 Duel Commander
- 2 Limited
 - 2.1 Sealed deck
 - 2.2 Booster draft

Constructed

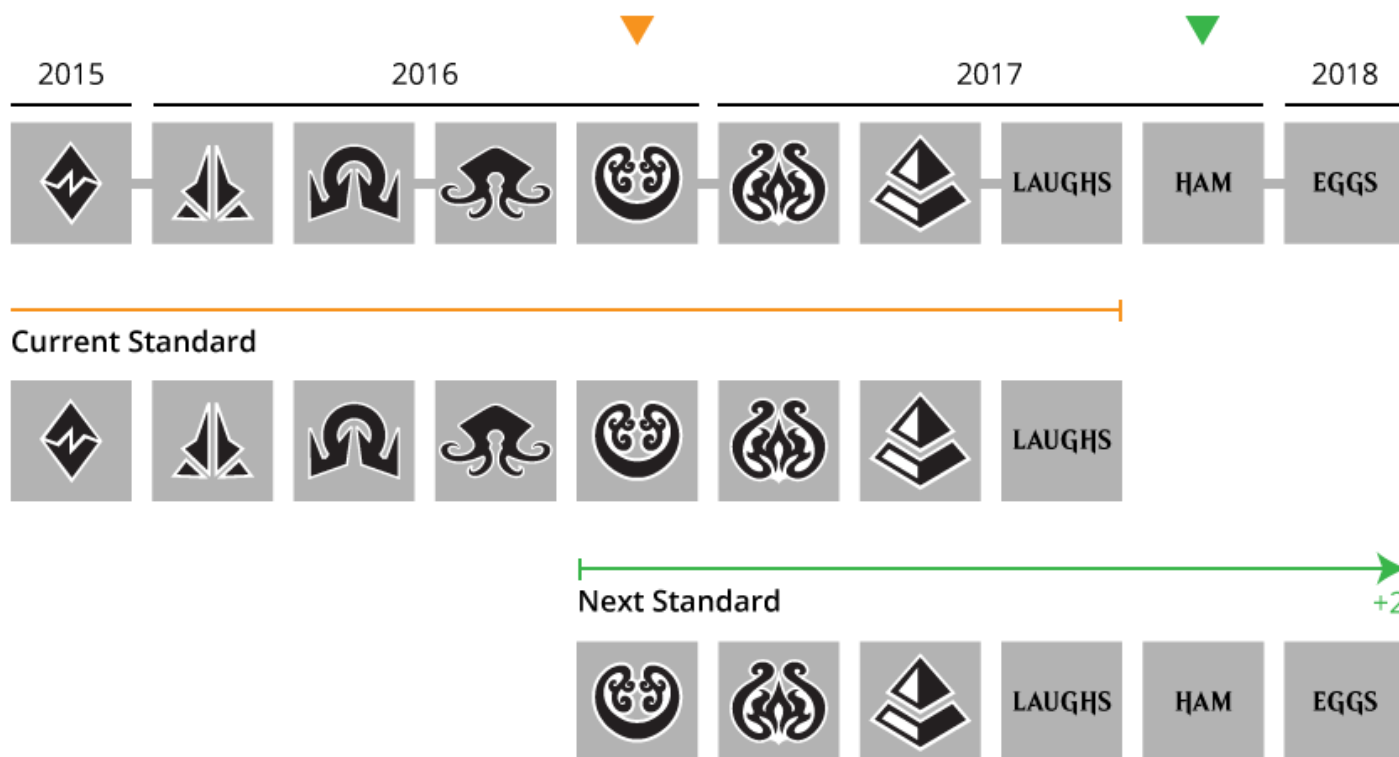
In constructed formats, players bring decks built with cards they own prior to the beginning of the tournament. Some rules are common to all Constructed formats:

- Each deck must contain at least 60 cards. There is no maximum deck size; the only requirement is that players must be able to shuffle their own deck without help.
- A deck can't contain more than 4 copies of each single card, except for basic lands.
- Players can bring a sideboard deck containing up to 15 cards. After the first game of each match, they can replace cards in their deck with ones from the sideboard, as long as the deck has at least 60 cards and the sideboard no more than 15.

Where constructed formats differ from one another is in the expansion sets they allow players to draw cards from. Some formats also have a list of cards that are **banned** from play. You can find an up-to-date list of the cards banned in each Constructed format [on Wizards of the Coast website](#).

Standard

Standard is the most popular Constructed format, and it allows cards from the last 5 to 8 expansion sets. It rotates once a year, with the release of the second set of the year (or fall set in the Northern Hemisphere), the two oldest blocks rotate out. Here is what the rotation looks like:



These are the Standard-legal sets:

- Kaladesh
- Aether Revolt
- Amonkhet
- Hour of Devastation
- Ixalan
- Rivals of Ixalan
- Dominaria

Kaladesh will be legal for two years and rotate out of Standard in the second half of 2018. When *Ixalan* was released *Battle for Zendikar* and *Shadows over Innistrad* blocks both rotated out of Standard. In 2018 *Dominaria* will join Standard in April, and *Core 2019* in July.

Modern

Modern is a non-rotating format that allows cards from *8th Edition* onward. You may notice that *8th Edition* is the set that transitioned from the classical layout to the modern one, but don't just assume that all cards with the modern layout are playable in Modern. Cards printed in special sets like Commander, From The Vault, Planechase, Archenemy, Duel Deck and Conspiracy are printed with the modern face, but they are *not* legal in Modern, unless of course they're a reprint of a legal card.

Example. *Viscera Seer* and *True-Name Nemesis* were both printed in Commander 2013. However, you can play *Viscera Seer* in Modern, as it has also been printed in Magic 2011, but you can't use *True-Name Nemesis*, that has been printed only in Commander 2013.



Also note that if a card has been printed in a legal set, all of its printing are legal, including older ones which sport the classic layout. Promotional cards are legal only if the same card has been printed in a legal set.

Example. Playing a *Lightning Bolt* from Limited Edition Beta in Modern is perfectly legal (and quite spiffy to boot), because *Lightning Bolt* has been reprinted in Magic 2010.



Note that Modern has a quite extensive list of of banned cards. The banned card list is updated four times a year, on the day after each new set pre-release.

Legacy and Vintage

Legacy and Vintage are collectively called *Eternal formats*, as they allow cards from all black- and white-bordered sets, including beginner sets like *Portal*. As the card pool is the same, the difference between these two formats consists in the different banned card lists. Legacy has a sizable list of cards banned for power-level reasons, whereas the only cards that are outright banned in Vintage are the cards that involve:

- ante
- dexterity
- sub-games
- Conspiracies

In addition to this, Vintage has a list of **restricted cards**. Players can have a single copy of each restricted card between their deck and sideboard.

Pauper

Pauper is a Magic Online-specific constructed format, in which players must build decks using only cards that were printed at least once as commons. Its popularity is also growing in real-life tournaments; however, note that Pauper events can be sanctioned, but must be reported as Casual events - when you judge one, be vigilant that the organizer sanctions them appropriately.

Commander

Originally known as Elder Dragon Highlander, Commander is a casual multiplayer format. It was born within the judge community, but has now spread outside of it, to the point where Wizards of the Coast releases preconstructed decks.^[1]

Commander is a *Highlander format*, which means that decks can contain a single copy of each card, except for basic lands.^[2] Players start with 40 life rather than the usual 20, as this format is all about long games and ridiculously huge plays.

Decks must also contain exactly 100 cards, one of which must be a legendary creature, that is designated to be that player's commander. All other cards in the deck can't have a **color identity** that includes color not found within the commander's color identity. The color identity of a card includes the colors of all mana symbols that appear in its mana cost and in its text box, plus the color of any **color indicator** the card may have.

Example. ***Zur the Enchanter**'s color identity is white, blue and black, as these colors appear in its mana cost. **Alesha, Who Smiles at Death** is white, black and red, as its mana cost includes a red mana symbol and its text box uses a white/black symbol. **Archangel Avacyn**'s color identity is white and red, as there are white mana symbols in its mana cost and a red color indicator on its back face.*

***Damnation** is a black card: it can be used in your deck if your general is Zur or Alesha, but not with Avacyn. **Unmake**'s color identity is white and black, so it is again inaccessible to Avacyn. **Sunforger**'s identity is white and red, so it can be played in an Alesha or Avacyn deck, but not with Zur.*



Commanders also have additional rules attached to them:

- They start the game from the **command zone**, and can be cast from there. Doing so costs 2 more for each time they have been cast from the command zone before in the game.
- If they would be put into a graveyard, library or hand, their owner may choose to put them in the command zone instead.
- If a player is dealt 21 combat damage by a single general, he loses the game.

The full rules and the banned list for the Commander format can be found [on the official website](#).

Duel Commander

A variant to this format exists, to tailor it to one-on-one competitive play. This format is also known as **French Commander**, as it was designed and popularized in France. It uses a completely different banned list than multiplayer Commander and players start the game with 20 life rather than 40.^[3] The full rules and the banned list for the Duel Commander format can be found [on the official website](#).

Limited

At Limited events, players receive some amount of sealed product, and they have to use exclusively cards in this limited pool to build their deck for the event. They have access to an unlimited supply of basic lands, excluding **Wastes**.

There are two main ways to play Limited, sealed deck and booster draft, but both share the following deck construction rules:

- Each deck must contain at least 40 cards. There is no maximum deck size.
- A deck can contain any number of copies of each single card.
- All cards in the limited pool that are not included in the deck form the sideboard. Players can also add to their sideboard how many basic lands as they want, even during the event.

At events run at REL Competitive, players must register their deck and restore it at the beginning of each match, exactly how they would in a Constructed tournament. At Regular REL, on the other hand, players can change their deck during the event.

Sealed deck

In a sealed deck tournament, each player receives six booster packs, opens them and uses the contents to build his deck. It's just that simple!

For Regular events, the organizer is free to provide any assortment of boosters, as long as each player receives the same combination. Premier events have specific requirements: pre-releases are run using special packs provided by Wizards, and Preliminary PTQs use six packs from the big set or four from the small set plus two from the big one.

Booster draft

In a booster draft tournament, each player receives three booster packs, then they sit around a table. These tables are called **pods**, and if possible they should consist of eight players. If the number of participants is not a multiple of eight, you can have different numbers, but never less than six or more than eleven.

Each player opens a pack, selects a card from there, passes the rest to the player sitting at his left and takes the cards from the player at this right. This process is repeated until the cards from the first pack are finished. Then players open the second booster pack and draft it in the same way, except now cards are passed to the right. Then they repeat the process with the third pack, passing to the left again. The cards each player has chosen will be his limited pool for this event.

Normally, players should only be paired with players from the same pod. However, if you want to run a booster draft tournament longer than three rounds, it's advisable to perform cross-pod pairings from round 4 onward.

^[4]

1. ↑ These decks contain new cards. As you have read above, these cards are legal in Vintage, Legacy and Pauper, but not in Modern or Standard.
2. ↑ This term obviously comes from the movie Highlander, since *there can be only one* of each card. Wizards doesn't use this term, to avoid potential copyright issues.
3. ↑ This is a relatively recent change: until 2016, players used to start with 30 life. Part of the Duel Commander community has decided not to follow this change, creating a new format called *Leviathan*. To this day, Leviathan works exactly as Duel Commander, except players start from 30 life.
4. ↑ To do this when using Wizards Event Reporter, you need to perform a new pod assignment at the end of round three, which will automatically group players in standings order, and then pair the fourth round. There is no way to change the pairing algorithm to Swiss once the tournament has started.

Two-Headed Giant

Two-Headed Giant (or 2HG) is a multiplayer format that is often played at Regular REL events, such as Prerelease.

In 2HG, matches are played between two teams of two players each. There are some differences from other Magic formats:

- each team has a shared life total, which starts at 30 life;
- the players on each team share their turns (they share every phase and step);
- the first mulligan is free (the first time a player takes a mulligan, he or she draws a new hand with the same number of cards as he or she had before);
- a team loses the game if it has 15 or more poison counters;
- teammates can consult while making their decisions, and see each other's hands;
- within each team, the player seated in the rightmost seat from the team's perspective is the primary player. If the players in a team can't agree on a choice, the primary player makes that choice;
- a match is first to one win, there is no sideboarding for constructed events, and if a game goes to a draw in limited, players can sideboard using their limited pool.

As there are teams, not single players, there are active teams (not active players), a whole team will get priority, there will be an attacking team, defending team, and so on.

Starting the game

Each team sits together on one side of the table. Using a dice, or another random method, they'll decide who will start the game. After shuffling and presentation of decks, the players draw their starting hand, and make mulligan decisions. Once every player has decided to keep their hand the game will start. The team who plays first skips the draw step of its first turn.

As mentioned above, the players of each team share turn. That means that there is a single draw step for a team, a single precombat main phase, a single combat phase, and so on. Players also share their life total and poison counters. Other resources, such as lands, cards in hand, creatures, and so on, are not shared.

Example. *You are playing a 2HG game and you have a **Cartouche of Ambition** in your hand. When you cast it you can choose to enchant only creatures you control, as per the Aura's text. The creatures controlled by your partner are not legal targets for this Aura (the resources, including lands, creatures, etc, are not shared between players on the same team).*



Example. In a 2HG game you control a **Zulaport Cutthroat**. Your opponent destroys it with a **Fatal Push**. When the triggered ability resolves, you will gain 1 life, and each opponent will lose 1 life. Because you are playing a 2HG game, that means that your team will gain 1 life, and the opposing team will lose 2 life, one for each member of the team. This happens because the ability says “each opponent”.

In cases where there's an ability that says “When you cast this card, target opponent loses 3 life and you gain 3 life.” only one player will lose life (you have to choose the target while putting the ability on the stack), so your team will gain 3 life, and the opposing team will lose 3 life.



Combat

The combat phase is quite similar to the one between 2 players. There are, of course, some differences.

First of all, there is an attacking team and a defending team. If something refers to the “defending player,” it refers to one specific player on the defending team, not to both of the defending players.

In the declare attackers step, the active team declares attackers. If an effect of an object controlled by a defending player prohibits a creature from attacking him or her, that creature can’t attack that player. At this point, for each attacking creature, the attacking team announces which defending player or planeswalker controlled by a defending player that creature is attacking.

In the declare blockers step the defending team declares blockers. Creatures controlled by the defending players can block any attacking creatures.

Example. When **Ulamog, the Ceaseless Hunger** is declared as an attacker the active team will chose which player Ulamog it's attacking. Its triggered ability will trigger and will go on the stack at the appropriate time. Once it resolves, the same player who is attacked by Ulamog has to exile twenty cards from his library.



Example. *Player A of the defending team controls a **Ghostly Prison**. If the attacking players decide to use their creatures to attack player B they won't have to pay the "tax" imposed by Ghostly Prison. Vice versa, for each creature attacking player A, the controller of that creature will have to pay 2.*



Tournaments

Two-Headed Giant can be played in constructed and limited tournaments.

Two-Headed Giant matches consist of one game. Drawn games (games without a winner) do not count towards the one game. As long as match time allows, the match continues until a team has won a game.

In 2HG constructed tournaments, unified constructed rules apply to the teams' decks. Except for basic lands and cards with text that specify otherwise, only four copies of a card, based on its English title, can be shared between the two decks.

For 2HG limited tournaments, the MTR recommends 8 boosters per team in sealed and 6 boosters for draft. For Prerelease events, each player will get a Prerelease pack with 6 boosters inside. That means that each team will get 12 boosters to build their decks. In Regular REL events, such as at Prerelease, if decklists are not used, players may freely change the composition of their decks between matches by exchanging cards from their deck for cards in their sideboard without being required to return their deck to its original composition before their next match. The recommended time limits are 20 minutes for deck registration, 60 minutes for deck construction in sealed, and 40 minutes for deck construction and registration in draft.

A minimum of 4 teams (8 players) must participate in a tournament for it to be sanctioned.