

Table Rules and Etiquette

In getting together to play role playing games with people, it's important to establish some basic rules for the table. Understanding how to interact with people at a table during a role playing game is a form of social etiquette. Here are some norms you should discuss and establish:

Party Chemistry and Respect: a group playing a game should establish the chemistry for the group. Let's assume that everyone is playing in order to have "fun". Does fun mean that you want to work together as a friendly, collaborative group of heroes working for the greater good? Does it mean you want to be an evil group of murder hobos robbing, killing, and constantly on the run? Does it mean you want to betray your party mates? A group must define this dynamic BEFORE playing...BEFORE even making characters. It's not fun if a whole group wants to be heroes who work together, and there's one person who is secretive, uncooperative, and basically a jerk.

Collaborative and not Adversarial: role playing games are a collaborative, interactive storytelling experience. It should NOT be us versus them; it should not be the DM versus the Players. The DM should facilitate the game and create the story. The DM should not set a goal of killing the characters.

Talking: how will you actually talk at the table? Talk over is a bad thing; it happens when a person starts talking and someone or other people talk over that person. Talking is a sharing activity; everyone needs to have a turn to talk out loud, share their ideas, and explain their intentions. Do you raise hands? Do you make eye contact? Does the DM point to each person? Do you set up an established pattern (left to right, oldest to youngest, etc.)? Whatever system you choose, remember that each person in the group should have an equal opportunity to talk.

Rolling: in short, don't roll unless you've been asked by a DM to make a roll. People who fidget sometimes like to just roll dice or spin dice. This can be a distraction to other people at the table. Additionally, some people can be frequent rollers, and can be tempted to cheat by rolling prematurely (before a roll is called), then sitting on a good roll and claiming that it counts. Example: players are about to get into combat, and Player A rolls a d20, getting an 18. Then he says "I got an 18 for my initiative roll." That is pretty close to cheating; so, don't roll until you are told to do so. ALSO, don't quickly pick up your die after making a roll. It should be left on the table where you rolled it, so other people and the DM can confirm your roll. Sometimes people are tempted to fudge a roll (they rolled poorly, so they quickly pick up the die and claim to have rolled a higher number). This is cheating.

Explaining your intentions versus just rolling to do something: when you are a player, and you want your character to do something, you should explain what you want to do and how you want to do it, then the DM should respond by either allowing it or asking you to make the appropriate roll for the intended action. DON'T JUST ROLL.

There's always a chance, but sometimes there isn't: mechanically speaking, there might be a chance you could accomplish an extremely difficult task. But sometimes the STORY or SETTING makes it so that the task you want to do isn't realistically possible. Even if you have proficiency in something AND you roll a nat 20, it doesn't ALWAYS mean you succeed. Sometimes, in an engaging role playing game, the realism of the game outweighs the mechanics in the rules. This is at the DM's discretion.

Try NOT to say No: this rule is for the DM. If a player wants their character to do something that isn't convenient or isn't realistically possible, don't just say "No." Try to either allow them to attempt it and fail, or describe why it isn't very likely or realistic.

But don't be afraid to say no: being a DM is a balancing act. You can't be a pushover and let the players do ridiculous, unrealistic things that their characters aren't reasonably able to do. Sometimes you have to say no, that's not possible.

Be Prepared: bring your paper, character sheet, pencil, dice, and books.

Know your Role: you have a character, right? You should know what your character can do? What skills and knowledge does your character possess? What fighting abilities do you have? What spells do you have?

Plan Your Moves: when a group gets into initiative, listen to what's going on at the table and think about what YOUR character will do when it's your turn. Plan what you want to do and be ready to explain when it's your turn.

Respect the Stuff: if you are using other people's books or dice, please respect them. If your fingers are covered in Cheeto dust or Taki spices, don't put your fingers all over someone's book or dice.

Personal Hygiene: personal hygiene is important; if you smell or your breath smells, that's not cool for people sitting next to you.

Respectful Interaction: respect each other. If someone has an idea and you think it's dumb, keep your opinion to yourself, OR explain why you aren't sure about the idea. But either way, be nice. Keep in mind that even though this is a game, you are playing at a table with real people who have feelings.