Lightning 5e

Version 0.25 – 16 December 2023

Lightning 5e is a simplified version of 5e intended for experienced game masters (**GMs**) and new or experienced players. Lightning 5e is designed to

- be small enough to print and take on the go.
- let players build characters in under 5 minutes.
- use common concepts from 5e so new players can ramp up to full 5e after playing this version.
- give publishers a lightweight, royalty-free, 5e system to include in adventures or campaigns.

Differences from Standard 5e

Lightning 5e differs from 5e in the following ways:

- No ability scores, just bonuses and a standard array.
- Four classes: fighter, cleric, rogue, and wizard.
- No skill list. Characters use ability bonuses and a proficiency bonus based on class or background.
- No spell list. Spells are adjudicated like other actions with effects described by players.
- Simplified class mechanics.
- Monster stat blocks built from the monster's CR.
- Attribute-based armor class.
- Simplified leveling. No subclasses.

Core Mechanic – D20 Check

Lightning 5e focuses on 5e's core mechanic – the **D20 check**. A typical interaction looks like this:

- The GM describes the in-game situation.
- The player describes their character's action.
- If the action isn't challenging, the character automatically succeeds.
- If there's an interesting chance of failure, the GM chooses a **difficulty class** (**DC**) from 10 (easy) to 25 (very hard), **defaulting to DC 15** in most cases.
- The player and GM determine the applicable **ability** for the activity. If the character is likely proficient at this type of activity based on their **class**, or **background**, they add their **proficiency bonus** to the check.
- The player makes a **D20 check** by rolling a D20, adding their **ability bonus,** and potentially adding their **proficiency bonus.**
- If the result is equal to or greater than the DC, the activity succeeds. Otherwise, it fails.
- The GM describes the in-game results.

Advantage, Inspiration, and Help

Under certain circumstances, the GM may determine a character has **advantage** or **disadvantage** on a D20 check. If the character has advantage, they roll 2d20 and take the *greater* result. If they have disadvantage, they roll 2d20 and take the *lesser* result.

Characters begin each session with **inspiration**. After any D20 check, the player can spend their inspiration, gaining advantage on the check.

A character regains inspiration if they roll a 1 on any D20 check or fail two checks in a row. A character can only have one inspiration at a time.

A character may use their action to **help** another character, granting them advantage on a check. In combat, a character can use the help action to give another character advantage on their next D20 check.

Character Creation

Characters begin at 1st level. To build a character:

- Choose a class (fighter, cleric, rogue, or wizard).
- Choose a background and ancestry and note your proficiency bonus.
- Assign ability bonuses.
- Calculate **hit points**, **armor class**, **attack bonus**, and **damage**.
- Choose a name.

Background, Ancestry, Proficiency

Choose or roll for a background or make up your own.

1	Acolyte	11	Knight
2	Artisan	12	Mercenary
3	Charlatan	13	Noble
4	Courtier	14	Outlander
5	Criminal	15	Pirate
6	Entertainer	16	Relic Hunter
7	Folk Hero	17	Sage
8	Gladiator	18	Sailor
9	Hunter	19	Soldier
10	Investigator	20	Spy

Choose an ancestry such as human, elf, dwarf, halfling, or one of your own. Ancestries are entirely story-based with no mechanical effects.

Characters begin with a **+2 proficiency bonus**. When making a d20 check related to your class or background, add your proficiency bonus to the check at the GMs discretion.

Characters gain a +1 proficiency bonus at 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th level.
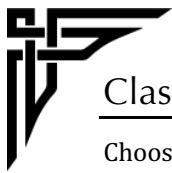
Classes

Choose from Fighter, Rogue, Cleric, or Wizard.

Fighter

- **Primary ability:** Strength or Dexterity
- *Weapon mastery (1st Level).* The fighter uses a 1d10 for damage. This goes up to 1d12 at 6th level.
- *Action Surge (2nd Level).* On your turn, you can take one additional action. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again. Starting at 17th level, you can use it twice before a rest, but only once on the same turn.

Rogue

- **Primary ability:** Dexterity
- *Sneak Attack (1st Level).* Once per turn, when you attack with advantage, add 3 damage to the roll. This damage increases by 3 every odd level.
- *Cunning Action (2nd Level).* As part of your movement, you can attempt to hide by making a DC 15 Dexterity check. While hidden, attacks against you are at disadvantage and you have advantage on your next attack. You are no longer hidden once you attack.

Cleric

- **Primary ability:** Wisdom
- *Disciple of Life (1st level).* As an action, you can heal a character 1d8 per level. You can do this a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. When you finish a long rest, you regain your expended uses.
- *Destroy Evil (2nd level).* The cleric inflicts 4 extra damage on attacks that target undead or fiends. This increases by 4 at 3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th, 15th, and 18th level.

Wizard

- **Primary ability:** Intelligence
- *Arcane Blast (1st level).* As an action, you can attack a number of creatures within 60 feet equal to your proficiency bonus. Make a D20 check (DC 15) using your Intelligence + proficiency bonus. On a success, the attacked creatures take 5 damage per proficiency bonus or half on a failure. You can do this a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. When you finish a long rest, you regain your expended uses.
- *Mage Armor (2nd level).* You gain +1 to AC.

Ability Bonuses

Characters have six abilities: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. During character creation, players assign the following bonuses to these abilities:

$$+3, +2, +2, +1, +1, +0$$

The following list describes each ability and their typical uses.

- **Strength**. Physical might, feats of strength, heavy weapons, heavy armor.
- **Dexterity.** Nimbleness, acrobatics, stealth, subtlety, light weapons, light armor.
- **Constitution.** Physical fortitude, endurance. Increases hit points.
- **Intelligence.** Knowledge, a keen mind, understanding magic, intellect.
- **Wisdom.** Perception, worldly experience, healing.
- **Charisma.** Charm, deception, persuasion.

Players typically assign the +3 bonus to their class's primary ability.

Hit Points, AC, Attack, and Damage

All characters begin with hit points equal to 8 + their Constitution bonus. Each level, characters gain 5 more hit points plus their Constitution bonus. For example, a 3rd level character with a +2 Constitution would have 24 hit points.

A character's **armor class (AC)** equals 10 + the better of their Strength or Dexterity bonuses + their proficiency bonus. For example, a 1st level character with a +3 Strength has AC 15.

A character's attack bonus is equal to their class's primary ability bonus + their proficiency bonus (most often +5 at 1st level).

Characters inflict 1d8 + their primary ability bonus in **damage** on a successful attack.

If a character takes damage equal to their hit points, they are incapacitated and cannot act until healed. A character can use an action to give an incapacitated character 1 hit point.

Equipment

Characters possess weapons, armor, and equipment suitable for their class along with standard adventuring equipment. Players can choose specific equipment their character would reasonably possess with the GM's permission.

Lightning 5e doesn't include details for gold pieces and treasure. Lightning 5e assumes the same economics as standard 5e and GMs are free to include monetary treasure with a gold piece value.

Combat Initiative

At the start of combat, each character **rolls initiative** by making a D20 check and adding their Dexterity bonus. Monsters always have an initiative of 12. Characters and monsters act in order of the results from highest to lowest.

Movements and Actions

On their turn, a character or monster can **move** and take an **action**. The GM describes the layout and positioning of combatants. Characters and monsters can move 30 feet on their turn. Ranged attacks have a maximum range of 60 feet. A character or monster can use their action to **dash**, moving an additional 30 feet on their turn. Characters can take their action in the middle of a move and continue their move afterwards. There are no opportunity attacks.

Attacks and Damage

Players describe their attacks, from swinging a greatsword to casting a lightning blast. On an **attack action**, the player rolls an **attack roll** by making a D20 check using their most applicable ability bonus based on their type of attack and adding their proficiency bonus. Compare the result to the monster's AC. If the roll succeeds, the character inflicts damage equal to 1d8 + primary ability bonus + any magic item bonus. If a character or monster rolls a 20 on an attack roll, they score a **critical hit**, doubling damage. A monster dies or is incapacitated (player's choice) when it takes damage equal to its hit points.

Characters gain an extra attack at 5th, 11th, and 17th level when taking the attack action. They can use all these attacks against a single opponent, or split attacks among multiple opponents, moving between attacks if desired.

When monsters attack characters, they make a D20 check using their attack bonus versus the character's AC. On a hit, they inflict a damage to the character.

Some monsters or environmental effects may have special attacks based on their fiction. When a monster or dangerous environment affects a character, the GM determines the targeted ability. The attacked character then makes a **saving throw** by rolling a D20 check using the targeted ability bonus versus the DC of the monster or effect. If this targets the primary ability of the character based on their class, they add their proficiency bonus to the check. Any effect from this special attack translates to damage.

Healing and Rests

Once each day a character may take a 1-hour **short rest** and recover hit points equal to 1d8 per level.

The day resets and all hit points are restored when characters take an 8-hour **long rest.**

Leveling Up

Characters in Lightning 5e level up at story milestones determined by the GM. As characters level, they gain the following features:

- Each level characters gain 5 hit points + their Constitution bonus.
- At 4th, 8th, 12th, and 16th, characters gain a +1 ability bonus to an ability of their choice (max +5 in any single ability).
- At 5th, 9th, 13th, and 17th, characters gain a +1 proficiency bonus.
- At 5th, 11th, and 17th, characters gain one additional attack when they attack as their action.

Magic Items

Throughout their adventures, characters may acquire magic items. A +1 sword or wand, for example, provides a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage. A suit of magical armor offers a +1 bonus to AC. A healing potion recovers 7 hit points to the character who drinks it. The GM determines what abilities other magic items might possess.

Typically, characters acquire a +1 weapon by 5th level, a +2 weapon by 11th level, and a +3 weapon by 17th level.

Other potential magic items include:
1. **Bag of holding.** Holds 500 pounds.
2. **Boots of elvenkind.** Make no sound walking.
3. **Bracers of archery.** +2 damage with bows.
4. **Broom of flying.** Grants flight.
5. **Cloak of elvenkind.** Advantage while sneaking.
6. **Cloak of protection.** +1 AC and saving throws.
7. **Eyes of the eagle.** Advantage on perception.
8. **Eversmoking Bottle.** Fill large area with smoke.
9. **Gauntlets of ogre power.** Strength becomes +4.
10. **Hat of disguise.** Advantage on disguise checks.
11. **Headband of intellect.** Intelligence becomes +4.
12. **Helm of telepathy.** Detect thoughts DC 13.
13. **Immovable rod.** When set holds 8,000 pounds.
14. **Lantern of revealing.** Illuminate invisibility.
15. **Luckstone.** +1 on checks and saving throws.
16. **Manta Ray Cloak.** Swim and breathe underwater.
17. **Necklace of adaptation.** Breathe anywhere.
18. **Pearl of power.** Cast one extra utility spell daily.
19. **Rope of climbing.** 60-foot magical rope.
20. **Slippers of spider climbing.** Walk up walls.
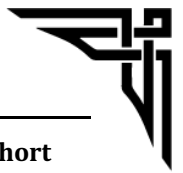
Casting Spells

Wizards and clerics can use their action to cast **spells.** There are two types of spells: **attack spells** and **utility spells**.

Attack spells work like other attacks in Lightning 5e. Regardless of how the player describes their attack spell, the mechanics are the same as any other attack.

When casting utility spells, the player describes their desired effect, and the GM determines if it makes sense given the character's level. If it makes sense, the spell is cast and the effect occurs. If the GM determines there's a chance for failure, the GM determines the DC (default DC 15 or the DC of the creature affected), and the spellcaster rolls a D20 check. On a failure, the spell fizzles. On a success, the effect succeeds. The GM determines the spell's duration.

Spellcasters can cast a number of utility spells equal to their proficiency bonus plus the primary ability bonus of their class. They regain their expended uses when they finish a long rest.

Example Utility Spells

The following is a list of example utility spells for wizards and clerics. The further along the list, the more powerful the spell. The higher level the caster, the bigger the potential effect determined by the GM.

GMs can use this list to infuse magic items with a single-use or daily-use spells.

Wizard Spells

Dancing Lights: Create up to four magical lights.
Mage Hand: Conjure a hand to manipulate objects.
Mending: Perform simple repairs on an object.
Message: Send short messages to other creatures.
Minor Illusion: Create a small, limited illusion.
Charm Person: Force a humanoid to view you as a trusted friend.
Comprehend Languages: Use magic to better interpret languages you don't understand.
Detect Magic: Sense the presence of magical auras.
Disguise Self: Appear like another humanoid.
Feather Fall: Fall slowly.
Floating Disk: Create a floating platform.
Fog Cloud: Create an area of fog.
Sleep: Cause enemies to fall into a magical slumber.
Unseen Servant: An invisible force performs tasks.
Darkness: Shroud an area in magical darkness.
Detect Thoughts: Read minds.
Enlarge/Reduce: Increase or decrease size.
Gust of Wind: Create a powerful gust of wind.
Invisibility: Render a creature invisible.
Levitate: Cause one creature or object to float.
Locate Object: Know the whereabouts of an object.
Spider Climb: Walk on walls or ceilings.
Dispel Magic: End ongoing magical effects.
Fly: Grant a creature the ability to fly.

Gaseous Form: Make a creature insubstantial and able to fly.
Glyph of Warding: Create a magical trap.
Major Image: Create a large, realistic illusion.
Water Breathing: Grant water breathing.
Water Walk: Grant the ability to walk on water.
Dimension Door: Teleport great distances.
Locate Creature: Know a creature's whereabouts.
Polymorph: Transform a creature into another.
Wall of Fire: Create a wall of fire.
Animate Objects: Create constructs to smite foes.
Dream: Invade a creature's dreams.
Scrying: Observe a creature on the same plane.
Telekinesis: Move with the power of thought.
Teleportation Circle: Open a portal to another location.
Wall of Force: Create a wall of invisible force.
Wall of Stone: Create a wall of nonmagical stone.
Teleport: Teleport across vast distances.
Gate: Create a portal to another plane.
Time Stop: Stop time.
Wish: Make a wish. Be careful.

Cleric Spells

Light: Enchant one object to emit light.
Mending: Perform simple repairs on an object.
Spare the Dying: Stabilize a dying creature.
Thaumaturgy: Manifest a display divine power.
Create or Destroy Water: Create or destroy water.
Detect Evil and Good: Sense otherworldly influences.
Detect Poison and Disease: Sense and identify poisons and diseases.
Calm Emotions: Suppress strong emotions.
Continual Flame: Create a torch-like flame.
Find Traps: Know whether traps are present.
Lesser Restoration: Restore a minor hindrance.
Silence: Create a bubble of magical silence.
Zone of Truth: Create a zone of truth.
Clairvoyance: See and hear at a distance.
Create Food and Water: Conjure food and water.
Daylight: Fill an area with magical daylight.
Speak with Dead: Compel the dead to answer.
Tongues: Understand any heard language.
Divination: Ask a higher power about the future.
Stone Shape: Reshape stone.
Greater Restoration: Restore a greater hindrance.
Legend Lore: Obtain hidden knowledge.
Raise Dead: Return a dead creature to life.
Scrying: Observe someone on the same plane.
Word of Recall: Teleport to a sanctuary.
Plane Shift: Transport to another plane.
Control Weather: Alter the weather.

Monsters

Monsters in Lightning 5e are simplified from standard 5e. Environmental objects or effects can use the same mechanics as monsters.

GMs create monsters during gameplay by choosing a **challenge rating** (**CR**) between 1 and 20 based on the monster's story and fiction. A CR 1 might be a skeleton, a giant rat, or a bandit. A CR 10 might be a powerful giant or young dragon. A CR 20 might be an ancient dragon or a lich. The monster's statistics are calculated with the following rules (always round down):

- **AC / DC**: 12 + 1/2 CR
- **Hit Points:** 10 × CR
- **Attack Bonus:** 3 + 1/2 CR
- **Total Damage Per Round:** 5 × CR
- **No. Attacks:** 1 + CR/4

At CR 4, 8, and 16, monsters gain one additional attack, and their total damage per round is split among these attacks. Thus, a CR 6 monster would have two attacks each dealing 15 damage.

Monster Stats

Below are quick-use monster stats through CR 15.

| CR	AC / DC	HP	Atk	# Atks	Dam / Atk
1	12	10	+3	1	5
2	13	20	+4	1	10
3	13	30	+4	1	15
4	14	40	+5	2	10
5	14	50	+5	2	12
6	15	60	+6	2	15
7	15	70	+6	2	17
8	16	80	+7	3	13
9	16	90	+7	3	15
10	17	100	+8	3	12
11	17	110	+8	3	18
12	18	120	+9	4	15
13	18	130	+9	4	16
14	19	140	+10	4	17
15	19	150	+10	4	18

Determining Encounter Difficulty

In Lightning 5e, GMs determine the type, number, and difficulty of monsters based on the story and situation in the game's world.

A monster with a CR equal to a character's level is a difficult challenge for that character.

An encounter may be difficult if the sum of monster CRs is equal to the sum of total character levels.

A single monster may be difficult for a group of characters if its CR is greater than 1.5 × the average level of the group.
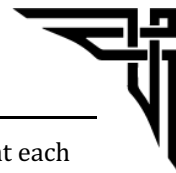
Example Monsters by CR

The following table offers example monsters at each challenge rating. Lighting 5e CRs don't directly correspond to standard 5e challenge ratings.

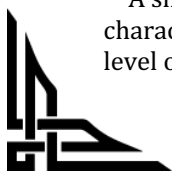| CR	Example Monsters
1	Bandit, cultist, giant rat, skeleton
2	Black bear, scout, shadow
3	Dire wolf, specter, spy
4	Ghast, ogre, priest
5	Ettin, knight, mummy, werewolf
6	Elemental, mage, medusa, wyvern
7	Stone giant, young black dragon
8	Assassin, frost giant
9	Frost giant, young blue dragon
10	Stone golem, young red dragon
11	Djinni, efreeti, horned devil
12	Archmage, erinyes
13	Adult white dragon, vampire
14	Adult black dragon, ice devil
15	Adult green dragon, mummy lord
16	Adult blue dragon, iron golem
17	Adult red dragon
18	Demilich
19	Balor
20	Lich, ancient dragon

Principles of Great GMing

Keep the following principles in mind while preparing and running your games.

- Let the story unfold at the table.
- Build situations and let the characters choose their approach.
- Be the characters' biggest fan. Help them succeed.
- Use the tools and techniques that help you improvise during the game.
- Focus your prep on your next game session.
- Build the world from the characters outward.
- Focus on the fiction, not the mechanics.
- Pay attention to pacing. Keep things moving.

Licensing

Name		Class	
Background		Species	

Str	
Dex	
Con	
Int	
Wis	
Cha	

AC	HP	Dam	Level	Prof

Weapon		Attack	Dam

Abilities   Inspiration:

Equipment   Gold:

Portrait

Utility Spells	Utility Spells Cast

Name		Class	
Background		Species	

Str	
Dex	
Con	
Int	
Wis	
Cha	

AC	HP	Dam	Level	Prof

Weapon		Attack	Dam

Abilities   Inspiration:

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