5E ENCOUNTER BUILDING GUIDELINES

ENCOUNTER BUILDING TIPS

- Choose monsters that make sense for the current situation and story. When needed, use the chart below to determine if an encounter is potentially deadly.
- Tune battles by increasing or decreasing hit points, damage, or the number of monsters.
- Many factors can alter the difficulty of a fight, including player experience, character synergy, encounter circumstances, and the state of the party's resources.
- Take it easy on 1st-level characters. They're squishy.
- Your experience as a GM will eventually be a better gauge of encounter balance than this or any other chart.

USING THIS CHART

Start off by finding the row containing the level of the characters. Then find the cell containing the challenge rating closest to the CR of the monsters you've selected for the encounter.

The column header of that cell tells you the ratio of the number of monsters to characters. If there are more monsters of a higher challenge rating then the chart recommends, the encounter could be potentially deadly.

For example, a group of four 5th-level characters stumbles into a camp of four ogres (CR 2). Checking the row for 5th-level characters, you then look across to find CR 2. The column header tells you that the ideal ratio is one monster per character. Since you have four characters facing four monsters, this encounter isn't likely to be deadly.

Character Level	Monster Challenge Rating				
	4 Monsters per Character	2 Monsters per Character	1 Monster per Character	1 Monster per 2 Characters	1 Monster per 4 Characters
1st	—	—	1/4	1/2	1
2nd	—	—	1/2	1	3
3rd	—	1/4	1	2	4
4th	—	1/4	1	2	5
5th	1/4	1	2	4	8
6th	1/4	1	3	5	9
7th	1/2	1	3	6	10
8th	1/2	1	3	6	12
9th	1/2	2	4	7	12
10th	1/2	2	4	7	14
11th	1	3	5	8	15
12th	1	3	5	10	17
13th	1	3	6	10	18
14th	1	4	6	11	19
15th	1	4	7	12	20
16th	2	4	7	13	20
17th	2	4	8	14	21
18th	2	5	8	14	21
19th	2	5	9	15	22
20th	3	6	10	16	23

QUICK ENCOUNTER BUILDING

When building encounters, start by choosing the type and number of monsters that make sense for the situation.

Then use the following guidelines to compare the challenge rating of the monsters, the level of the characters, and the ratio of monsters to characters. If the quantity of monsters or their challenge rating is beyond the indicated guidelines, the encounter might be deadly. Be especially careful with potentially deadly encounters when the characters are 1st level.

FOR CHARACTERS OF 1ST LEVEL

- **CR 0 to 1/4:** One monster per character
- **CR 1/2:** One monster per two characters
- **CR 1:** One monster per four characters

FOR CHARACTERS OF 2ND TO 4TH LEVEL

- **CR = 1/10 level:** Two monsters per character
- **CR = 1/4 level:** One monster per character
- **CR = 1/2 level:** One monster per two characters
- **CR = Level:** One monster per four characters

FOR CHARACTERS OF 5TH TO 20TH LEVEL

- **CR = 1/10 level:** Four monsters per character
- **CR = 1/4 level:** Two monsters per character
- **CR = 1/2 level:** One monster per character
- **CR = 3/4 level:** One monster per two characters
- **CR = Level + 3:** One monster per four characters

Finally, tune encounters by adjusting the number of monsters, increasing or decreasing hit points, or making named or unique monsters more powerful.

Hit Points: Standard monster hit points are an average of the monster's HD range. You can increase or decrease hit points within that range to model particularly weak or particularly strong monsters.

To make a fight easier, you can also treat monsters as "instant minions," ignoring their usual hit points and letting a single attack kill them. Having a few enemies die quickly can turn the tide in favor of the characters and keep a battle from feeling stale.

Named Monsters: Adding an extra attack or maximizing damage can make a named monster or unique foe more challenging. Named monsters can also be given legendary actions or the Legendary Resistance feature to make the fight more interesting.

RUNNING LARGE NUMBERS OF MONSTERS

For Attacks: Subtract the monsters' attack modifier from the defender's AC and consult the Result column. Determine the number of monsters who hit by dividing the total number of monsters by the number indicated under Monsters per Single Success. If the monsters that hit have advantage, double their damage dealt. If they have more than one attack, multiply the damage by the number of attacks.

For Saving Throws: Subtract the monsters' saving throw modifier from the effect's saving throw DC, and consult the Result column. Determine the number of monsters that succeed on the saving throw by dividing the total number of monsters by the number indicated under Monsters per Single Success.

Result	Monsters per Single Success
< 6	1
6–12	2
13–14	3
15–16	4
17–18	5
19	10
20+	20

Pooling Hit Points: When running a large number of monsters, consider pooling their hit points together. Then subtract the damage dealt by characters to any of those monsters from the pool, instead of tracking damage to each monster independently.

Every time the pool takes damage equal to the hit point value of a monster, one monster dies. For example, in an encounter against twenty-five skeletons with 13 hit points each, the pool has a total of 325 hit points. If a fighter swings a greatsword and hits for 29 damage, the pool is reduced by 29 and two skeletons die.

Each time a monster dies because an effect automatically deals enough damage to kill it, its hit points are deducted from the pool. For example, if a sorcerer hits eight skeletons with a fireball spell (dealing a minimum of 14 fire damage on a successful save), each of the eight skeletons takes 13 damage and dies, and the pool is reduced by 104 hit points.