

THE TARGET 20 SYSTEM

A Core Mechanic for Classic D&D

The "Target 20" core mechanic provides an elegant way to resolve actions in classic D&D without the need for table lookups, complicated math, or recording of any new statistics. The basic system is this:

$\mathbf{d20 + level + modifiers \geq 20}$
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Attack Rolls

For attacks, roll $d20 + \text{fighting ability} + \text{armor class}$ (plus any other modifiers, such as for dexterity and magic). The "fighting ability" is the same as the fighter's level or monster's hit dice. Clerics add $2/3$ their level, and wizards add $1/2$ their level (rounding down). The "armor class" assumes the classic descending-AC system.

Saving Throws

Saves are made by rolling $d20 + \text{level} + \text{type bonus}$. Bonuses for different save categories are as follows: spells +0, breath +1, stone +2, paralysis +3, death +4. In addition, wizards (and thieves) suffer -2 to paralysis, breath, and death.

Thief Skills

If thieves are in play, then you can also resolve their special skills by rolling $d20 + \text{level} + \text{dexterity bonus}$. This applies to functions such as: open locks, remove traps, move silently, hide in shadows, and pick pockets.

How Accurate Is It?

While the results of the Target 20 System are not exactly the same as the published books, they are very close. For example, the attack rolls above, when compared to the tables in OD&D, across all armors and classes for levels 1-12, have an average absolute deviation of just 1.04. (In other words, you will usually be within 1 point in 20 of the probabilities given in the books.) This value is 1.44 for saving throws, and 2.96 for thief skills (that is, within 14.8%, where we assume an ability bonus of +1).

The Target 20 System will likewise be appreciably close to the chances given for attacks, saves, and skills in 1E, 2E, and B/X-style rules. For spreadsheet analyses of the probabilities in question, see online at <http://www.superdan.net/oed/target20>. For a discussion of how this relates to established principles from cognitive psychology, see: <http://deltasdnd.blogspot.com/2009/07/what-is-best-combat-algorithm.html>.

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