

5 RULES OF GIVING

FEEDBACK

So you're reading some original content for D&D 5e and you want to give feedback? That's great! Here are a few simple rules to help you communicate your ideas...

RULE 1: BE RESPECTFUL

There's no reason to be disrespectful to people you don't know on the internet. Being respectful means not using pejoratives to describe the original author, not assuming they have certain intentions (such as bringing an overly powered character option to the game), or peppering positive comments with clauses like "I guess" or "at least".

Even if you have spot on feedback it will be immensely hard for the author to take it seriously if you show them a lack of respect. Worse (for you) a lack of respect says a lot more about you as a person than it does about the content or the original author.

RULE 2: SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

Don't exaggerate for effect, use flippant language, or use sarcasm. If there is a single ability presented in a piece that is potentially too powerful it isn't helpful to say, "this entire piece is so overpowered it is completely broken and nothing could fix it". Not only is that not what you mean, it's also not useful feedback for the author.

When you give feedback that does not exaggerate or intentionally misconstrue the author's material, they are more likely to engage you about your concerns.

THAT'S OP!

As a rule, I advise against using the expression "OP" or "overpowered". Not only does it generally break the 2nd and 4th rule of giving feedback, it's also so frequently used to disparage design that it's practically meaningless.

RULE 3: PRIORITIZE YOUR COMMENTS

If you have a lot of feedback about the material you're reading, prioritize your comments. If there are numerous significant points that need to be addressed, consider which ones are the most intrinsic or nefarious. While a wall of feedback text is a content creator's dream (they love getting constructive feedback) many will be hesitant to change too much all at once.

By prioritizing your comments you are helping to ensure that the material you feel is in most need of revision gets the attention it deserves.

KNOW WHEN NOT TO COMMENT

If you absolutely hate the concept the person is trying to convey, or you think it is so mechanically unsound as to be unsalvageable, your best course of action might be to not comment. Further, consider why you want to comment - is it to help improve the author's work or because you've had a crummy day and saying something condescending might cheer you up? If you sincerely want to help the author and feel you can comment while still following the 5 rules, go for it!

RULE 4: BE SPECIFIC

The author can't know what your concerns are unless you are specific about them. Saying, "this feature is totally too powerful, it's better than anything else in the game!" isn't very useful, especially if the feature has more than a few parts. In order for the author to know specifically what you find to be too powerful you have to say it. "This feature is too powerful because it provides damage dealing beyond what characters can normally deal at this level. Here is a damage output calculator. You should know that the average damage outputs of other character classes are..." Specific feedback allows the author to review that specific element that you are pointing to as out of place rather than having the author review the entire feature and trying to figure out why (for example) you think a bonus tool proficiency breaks the game.

Another excellent reason to be specific is that it will help you learn the rules of the game. Over the course of attempting to be specific you may discover that you have misread a rule, have misconceptions about the part of the rules being discussed, or find that there actually is precedence for such a design element elsewhere in game. Regardless of whether or not you learn something, the author will learn something from your specific feedback!

EXPECT A DIALOGUE

Many times when you are giving feedback to a content creator you might imagine that your point will be so immediately obvious and undeniably true that they will include whatever changes you suggest before even responding. The truth is, most of the time the content creator has put time, thought, and energy into the current version of the piece and will want to talk through your concerns before incorporating your feedback. While it is easy to read this as defensive, the truth is that content creators get a lot, and often conflicting, feedback. If a content creator responded to every piece of feedback by immediately including the suggested changes the result would quickly become completely nonsensical.

RULE 5: OFFER ALTERNATIVES

You don't always have to follow Rule 5 but, if you do, you are a saint. It's easy to pick apart someone else's design. When you offer alternatives it exhibits goodwill and further clarifies for the author what specifically you feel could be improved about the piece. You are by no means obligated to write new material for the author, simply giving a general idea about an alternative or suggesting features already in the game that they can reference is excellent.

AND THAT'S IT!

Giving useful feedback comes naturally to some people but to others, people who sincerely want to give feedback, it doesn't. By following these five rules I think you'll find your engagement with authors will improve, your points will be better heard, and you might learn something new about the game!

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