

They see me rolling (D20s), they hating.

Advantage & Disadvantage

Mundane human by day, level 15 half-elf
cleric by night.



DND DICE ROLLER

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE IN D&D



ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE ARE TWO OF THE most important dice rules in modern Dungeons & Dragons. They are also two of the easiest rules to explain badly.

At the table, the rule is simple:

- If you have advantage, roll two d20s and use the higher result.
- If you have disadvantage, roll two d20s and use the lower result.
- If you have both, they cancel out and you roll one d20.
- Multiple sources of advantage do not stack into three or four d20s.

That is the short version. The useful version is understanding when to use it, why it matters, and what mistakes to avoid.

WHAT ADVANTAGE MEANS

Advantage represents a favourable situation. Your character is not simply better in a permanent way. The moment, position, preparation, target, or circumstance gives them a better chance than normal.

Examples might include:

- Attacking a target that cannot see you.
- Making a check with meaningful help from another character.
- Using a class feature, spell, or special ability that grants advantage.
- Having strong leverage in a social situation.
- Trying something where your description genuinely improves your chance.

The important word is circumstance. Advantage is usually not a prize for being clever in a vague way. It is a way for the DM to say, “yes, that specific thing makes this roll more favourable.”

WHAT DISADVANTAGE MEANS

Disadvantage is the opposite. Something about the situation makes success harder than normal.

Common examples include:

- Attacking a target you cannot see clearly.
- Trying to shoot at long range.

- Making a check while rushed, restrained, poisoned, blinded, exhausted, or otherwise impaired.
- Attempting something delicate with bad tools or poor conditions.
- Acting from a position where the character is under real pressure.

Disadvantage should not be used as a punishment for every bad idea. Sometimes a bad idea just fails. Sometimes it needs a higher DC. Sometimes it causes a consequence without a roll. Disadvantage works best when the action is still possible, but the conditions are clearly hostile.

ADVANTAGE IS NOT A FLAT BONUS

A common mistake is thinking of advantage as something like a +5 bonus. It is not exactly that.

Advantage changes the shape of the roll. It makes low numbers less likely and high numbers more likely. Disadvantage does the reverse.

Here is a rough look at how it affects common target numbers with no modifier:

Target number needed	Normal d20	With advantage	With disadvantage
5 or higher	80%	96%	64%
10 or higher	55%	80%	30%
15 or higher	30%	51%	9%
18 or higher	15%	28%	2%
Natural 20	5%	9.75%	0.25%

That is why advantage feels powerful. It does not guarantee success, but it massively improves your odds on rolls you already had a real chance to make.

It also explains why disadvantage feels brutal. A hard roll becomes almost impossible. A moderate roll becomes unreliable. Even a simple roll can suddenly become tense.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT

If a roll has both advantage and disadvantage, roll one d20.

This is true even if there are several sources on one side and only one source on the other. Two sources of advantage and one source of disadvantage still cancel out to a normal roll. One source of advantage and three sources of disadvantage also cancel out to a normal roll.

Some players find this strange, but it keeps the game fast. You do not count every possible modifier. You ask one simple question: is this roll favoured, hindered, both, or neither?

ADVANTAGE DOES NOT STACK

If two different things give you advantage, you still roll two d20s, not three.

For example, suppose your rogue attacks from hiding and also receives help from an ally. Both could point toward advantage, but the roll still only has advantage once.

That does not mean the second benefit is useless. The DM might decide one benefit gives advantage while the other creates a different benefit, such as better positioning, more information, or a safer escape. But by the core dice mechanic, advantage itself does not stack.

WHEN DMs SHOULD GIVE ADVANTAGE

A useful rule of thumb is this:

Give advantage when the player's approach makes the roll meaningfully easier, but not automatically successful.

For example:

- A player describes how they brace a door before forcing it open.
- A bard gives a convincing argument and uses information the NPC cares about.
- A ranger studies tracks carefully before following them.
- A fighter uses the environment to pin an enemy into a bad position.

This encourages players to engage with the fiction instead of treating every roll like a button press.

The danger is giving advantage too often. If every colourful description grants advantage, advantage stops feeling special. Players also learn to pad every action with a speech just to fish for a better roll.

Use it when the description changes the situation, not merely when the description is longer.

WHEN DMs SHOULD GIVE DISADVANTAGE

Disadvantage works best when the obstacle is obvious and fair.

Good examples:

- The character is trying to read tiny text in darkness.
- The archer is firing through heavy rain at long range.
- The rogue is picking a lock while hanging from a rope.
- The wizard is trying to recall lore while panicked and injured.

Bad examples:

- The DM wants the player to fail.
- The player chose an option the DM did not expect.
- The scene needs more drama, but the penalty has no clear cause.
- The DM is annoyed and uses disadvantage as a mood tax.

Disadvantage should come from the world, not from the DM's frustration.

ADVANTAGE COMPARED TO RAISING OR LOWERING THE DC

Sometimes the DM has a choice. Should this be advantage, disadvantage, a higher DC, or a lower DC?

Use advantage or disadvantage when the character's situation changes the roll.

Use a DC change when the task itself is easier or harder.

Example:

- Picking a normal lock with excellent tools might grant advantage.
- Picking an unusually complex lock might require a higher DC.
- Picking a complex lock with excellent tools might still have a high DC, but with advantage.

This distinction keeps the game cleaner. The lock has its own difficulty. The character's situation affects how they roll against it.

COMMON SOURCES OF ADVANTAGE IN PLAY

Here are some of the most common places advantage appears:

- Attacking while hidden or unseen.
- Attacking certain impaired enemies, depending on the condition.
- The Help action, when the helper can realistically assist.
- Class features, spells, magic items, and feats.
- Inspiration or similar table rewards, depending on the version of the rules your group uses.
- Smart positioning or preparation that gives the character a real edge.

Do not assume every source always applies. The exact rule text matters, and the DM still decides whether the fictional setup makes sense.

COMMON SOURCES OF DISADVANTAGE IN PLAY

Disadvantage often appears when a character is impaired, poorly positioned, or working under bad conditions.

Examples include:

- Attacking a target you cannot see.
- Making ranged attacks in awkward circumstances.
- Certain conditions, such as being poisoned or restrained.
- Wearing armour or using equipment improperly, depending on the rules involved.
- Trying a task without enough time, visibility, leverage, or control.

Again, the key is context. Disadvantage is not just “this is difficult.” A difficult task might simply have a high DC. Disadvantage means the character is doing it under bad circumstances.

PLAYER ADVICE: HOW TO EARN ADVANTAGE WITHOUT BEING ANNOYING

Players often ask, “Can I get advantage?”

That is understandable, but it can become irritating if every roll turns into a negotiation.

A better approach is to describe what your character does and let the DM decide.

Instead of:

“Can I get advantage on Persuasion?”

Try:

“I mention the captain’s missing scouts, because we found their insignia earlier. I want him to know we are not just random mercenaries.”

Instead of:

“Can I get advantage on Athletics?”

Try:

“I wedge my shield under the stone slab first so I can lift from a better angle.”

This gives the DM something concrete to reward.

DM ADVICE: SAY YES, BUT NOT ALWAYS

Advantage is a great tool because it lets you reward good play without rewriting the whole encounter.

But if advantage becomes automatic, the game loses texture.

A good DM response might be:

- “Yes, that gives you advantage.”
- “No advantage, but I will lower the DC because that helps.”
- “No roll needed. That plan just works.”
- “That will not give advantage, but it changes what happens if you fail.”
- “You can try, but the condition is too poor. This is still at disadvantage.”

Those answers are more interesting than treating advantage as the only possible reward.

USING A DICE ROLLER FOR ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

A digital dice roller makes advantage and disadvantage easy.

For advantage, roll two d20s and take the higher result.

For disadvantage, roll two d20s and take the lower result.

If your roller supports drop-highest and drop-lowest settings, you can set this up directly:

Roll type	Dice	Setting
Normal check	1d20	No drop
Advantage	2d20	Drop lowest
Disadvantage	2d20	Drop highest

Then add your normal modifier after the d20 result.

For example, if your character has a +5 Stealth modifier:

- Normal: 1d20 + 5
- Advantage: roll 2d20, keep the higher, then add 5
- Disadvantage: roll 2d20, keep the lower, then add 5

FINAL THOUGHTS

Advantage and disadvantage are elegant because they are quick, visible, and dramatic. Everyone at the table understands what two d20s mean. The player gets a little burst of hope when rolling with advantage, and a little dread when rolling with disadvantage.

Used well, the rule rewards smart play, reinforces the fiction, and keeps the game moving.

Used carelessly, it becomes a bargaining chip or a blunt punishment.

The best approach is simple: let the situation matter, keep the ruling clear, and remember that advantage is strongest when it feels earned.

ADVANTAGE IN THE WILD

Things that should give advantage at your table, whether the book says so or not:

1. You described the attack before you rolled it. Properly. With a verb.
2. You remembered an NPC's name from three sessions ago.
3. You brought the snacks.
4. The plan was terrible, everybody knew it was terrible, and you did it anyway with total commitment.
5. Somebody at the table gasped.

Things that give disadvantage at every table, whether the book says so or not:

1. "Can I just roll?"
2. Checking your phone mid-description. The DM saw.
3. Explaining the rule to the DM. Correctly. Out loud. Again.

THE ONE RULE FOR REAL LIFE

Two rolls, keep the better one, is a fine way to make a decision. Ask the two friends who disagree with each other. Keep the answer you are still thinking about the next morning. Disadvantage is asking the one friend who always agrees with you.



DND DICE ROLLER

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