

# COLLABORATIVE GESTALT LEVELING

## WARNING: EXPERIMENTAL MECHANICS

Using these rules will make your players more powerful. Which can be fun, but is not for everyone or for every game.

## WHY REPLACE XP AND LEVELING RULES?

With standard XP rules, a 10th-level wizard needs 21,000 experience points to gain a level. This makes sense as a requirement for becoming an 11th-level wizard. A 1st-level rogue needs 300 experience points to become a 2nd-level rogue, which also makes sense. Why then, does a 10th-level wizard need 21,000 experience points to master the basic skills all rogues have mastered, and even worse, require another 15,000 to do exactly the same kind of training a 1st-level rogue can accomplish with just 300?

There are many fair and reasonable answers to this question which present historical context for why experience and multiclassing work the way that they do, or discuss the problems with more complicated systems which existed in the past, or why adding one to 5e seems like a bad move.

I'm going to ignore these answers and just get on with it.

## LEARNING FROM YOUR COMPANIONS

You likely meet all sorts of people in your travels. Lofty wizards living in castles in the clouds, flighty rogues dipping in and out of shadowy alleyways, maybe even griffon-riding fighters, or rangers eeking out a living in the wildest of locations. Each of these NPCs or fellow players has a unique set of skills and abilities, which given time and effort, they may be able to teach you.

This kind of experience, which comes from directly observing and learning from your peers is the basis of **gestalt leveling**, a technique for gaining features from classes without increasing your total character level. See the last section in this document for a more detailed explanation.

## EXPERIENCE

Most tables don't use standard XP rules. They use ad hoc or "Milestone" leveling where everyone gains a level whenever the DM says that they do. This isn't a bad system, nor is it always lazy DMing. If your game is very story-driven, your characters are even probably better off without XP. A DM can give you a level in rogue because you trained with the rogue and everything is fine and still reasonably balanced. Not to mention that in those kinds of games, combat is also usually run in a very theatrical way, and often with a bit of DM dice fudging to create the desired effects.

But for games which are not quite as story-driven, where balance is king, and you absolutely must kill enough rats to get the twenty-one-thousand experience for your wizard to learn *thieves' cant*, standard XP rules actively get in the way of common sense and the diversity of available character options. Replacing the XP rules can solve this problem.

## LINEAR EXPERIENCE

A character needs 100 XP to gain a level. This amount does not change at different stages of the game. An experience point is analogous to a percentage point towards leveling.

When you reach 100 or more XP, you can spend 100 XP to gain a level in your current class, or with your DM's approval, any other available base class, or a prestige class for which you qualify.

## AWARDING EXPERIENCE

In its most basic form, your DM decides when you gain XP and how much you gain, but the following sections provide DM guidelines for doing so.

In general, experience should only be awarded to a character for doing something that somehow contributes to improving their skills or abilities in a meaningful way. Characters should have incentives to go out on adventures and confront challenges that are commensurate with their tier-of-play or higher.

## UNDERSTANDING TIERS-OF-PLAY

Levels of play in D&D are divided into 4 tiers:

- **Tier 1** (levels 1–4): Local Heroes
- **Tier 2** (levels 5–10): Regional Heroes
- **Tier 3** (levels 11–16): Worldwide Heroes
- **Tier 4** (levels 17–20): Cosmic Heroes

If you use epic leveling rules, there is also a 5th tier.

- **Tier 5** (levels 21–25): Legendary Icons

These tiers-of-play are calculated according to the total level of a character (which includes main class(es) and prestige classes, but excludes all gestalt levels).

## HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE TO GIVE?

How quickly your DM gives experience is dependent on the style of play and the progression of the campaign. In general, the amount of experience given for an encounter which is commensurate with your tier-of-play remains consistent throughout a campaign, but can be adjusted based on the desired rate of progression through a particular set of levels.

Regardless the chosen value, be it 1 XP, 10 XP, or 100 XP per encounter, it can be modified on an encounter-by-encounter basis, as determined by the difficulty of the encounter relative to your tier.

For example, if the encounter is not appropriate for your tier, but would be appropriate for a tier one below you own, or is a particularly easy encounter, your XP rewards would be half the chosen value (or 0 if the encounter is trivial). But if the encounter would be appropriate for character one or more tiers above your level, or is particularly difficult, your XP rewards could be double or triple the normal rate.

Examples for different kinds of encounters are given below along with differentiations for their appropriate tiers-of-play.

## QUESTS/SURVIVAL

You gain XP when you finish quests, survive long or arduous journeys, or otherwise complete missions on which you practiced and honed your skills. This can include simply finding a hidden or lost item or location, safely returning to complete the mission and the bounty, or both.

- Tier 1: A local quest to a nearby location important to a small town or village.
- Tier 2: A regional quest to a location important to a kingdom or large corporation or given by an NPC with influence over a city or large guild.
- Tier 3: A distant quest to a location important throughout the world or given by an NPC with influence over a kingdom, alliance, or continent.
- Tier 4: A (possibly extraplanar) quest to a location important throughout the cosmos or given by an NPC with influence over entire planes of existence (such as a deity or major warlock patron).
- Tier 5: A quest to change the nature or number of the planes or of the gods or a similar cosmic undertaking.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCE

You gain XP when you win over influential NPCs, make allies of organizations, or otherwise dramatically increase your renown in the world.

- Tier 1: An NPC with influence over a small town or village, or the equivalent.
- Tier 2: An NPC with influence over a city or the equivalent.
- Tier 3: An NPC with influence over a kingdom, a continent, or the equivalent.
- Tier 4: An NPC (including a deity) with cosmic significance or influence across multiple worlds.
- Tier 5: A deity or other similar power which shares its divinity with you or passes on its legacy to you.

## TRAINING

You gain XP when you undergo periods of training during your downtime over which you study and practice your skills and abilities. To gain experience through training takes a minimum number of days equal to your level and requires an NPC or player who can help you train or study appropriately.

- Tier 1: Training with a tier 2 NPC or player.
- Tier 2: Training with a tier 3 NPC or player.
- Tier 3: Training with a tier 4 NPC or player.
- Tier 4: Training with a tier 5 NPC or player.
- Tier 5: Training directly with an avatar of a deity or similar.

## COMBAT

You gain XP for defeating monsters in combat, either by slaying them or otherwise pacifying them as a threat in another way (such as banishing a demon or locking away a powerful undead in a hallowed crypt).

- Tier 1: A local threat, a small band of minions, or a dangerous but wounded monster.
- Tier 2: A regional threat, an encampment of creatures, or a dangerous monster.
- Tier 3: A national or continental threat, a large coalition of creatures, or a legendary monster.
- Tier 4: A cosmic or world-ending threat, a major world-shaping martial or magical force, or a group of legendary monsters or creatures with legendary artifacts.
- Tier 5: A divine or extra-planar threat, a crucial universe-upending war between gods or similar creatures, or the true aspect of a deity.

## CAUTION: XP REWARDS

There are many ways for DMs to directly reward players for being creative, such as inspiration, extra loot (such as gems and gold), or renown within an organization or community.

In this system, giving extra XP can be used to augment these other rewards, but by no means should completely replace them. Remember, each experience point is worth much more than a equivalent point in the standard progression, so giving even 1 experience point to a player can equate to thousands of experience points under the old system.

## GESTALT LEVELING

Gestalt levels represent the skills and abilities that your character has learned from the NPCs and players that they have encountered. These skills need not (and usually do not) relate to your normal chosen class levels.

### GESTALT EXPERIENCE

Whenever you gain experience, you also gain half that much **Gestalt Experience**. This experience can only be used to take gestalt levels.

### GESTALT LEVELS

Gestalt levels are a separate track of levels that exist beside your normal class levels. Gaining gestalt levels is not multiclassing and does not affect your total character level, nor your tier-of-play, though you must meet the minimum multiclassing requirements for a class or prestige class to gain a gestalt level in it.

You can have a number of total gestalt levels equal to half your total class levels (rounded down). This includes if you have gestalt levels in multiple classes or prestige classes.

Additionally, you must have access to a tutor to adventure and train with in order to gain a gestalt level in a class that they have. This tutor can be an NPC or a player, but they must have the appropriate level in the class in which you are attempting to gain a gestalt level. For example, you must find a tutor with 5 or more levels in rogue in order to take your 5th gestalt level in rogue.

### GESTALT FEATURES

When you gain a gestalt level, you gain all the features of the chosen class at that level except hit points, proficiencies, saving throws, skills, and starting equipment.

You do not follow any of the spellcasting rules for multiclassing, instead you gain a separate pool of spell slots for your gestalt classes. If you have gestalt levels in multiple spellcasting classes, you follow the spellcasting rules for multiclassing for those spells (the easiest way to organize gestalt spellcasting is with a separate spell sheet). Spells, cantrips, and abilities from gestalt classes that refer to your level refer to your total character level as normal.

### EXCEPTIONS

In some worlds, certain gestalt options may be unavailable. Ask your DM if taking gestalt levels in a class (especially ones like sorcerer or warlock) makes sense in your world.

### EXAMPLES

A 10th level Eldritch Knight fighter with 1 level in bard could take 4 gestalt levels in wizard and 1 in paladin to become an 11th-level character with "ftr 10/brd 1/wiz 4/pal 1."