

SCHEDULING GAMES

Across its 50 years of publication, *Dungeon & Dragons* has released rules covering almost every imaginable situation. However, it has never dealt with a core problem which has perpetually bedeviled the game: scheduling. The Dark Lord does not defeat the brave adventuring party. Scheduling defeats the brave adventuring party.

This edition will provide a simple set of rules to ensure your campaigns run smoothly, with a maximum of momentum, and a minimum chance of ending prematurely.

These are the core rules...

1. The DM sets a regular time to play.
2. The game happens on that night, with whoever turns up.
3. The only time a date moves is if the DM can't make that time or if literally no other player can make it.

This is a change over the dominant play culture, so may require some introduction to a group unfamiliar with this concept.

DURING THE FIRST SESSION

The DM explains that they will be playing regularly at a set time. It is perfectly fine for people to miss sessions. Life is more important than a game, and must take priority. However, we *will* be playing whether any player makes it or not. If no one can, we may reschedule, but if not, we'll skip to the next session.

The DM should explain why. Most campaigns end through not doing this. This may be a fantasy game, but in the modern world, thinking everyone can be at every session is the real fantasy. We will find ways to make the game work without everyone at the table.

Arranging the games is an extra cognitive load, which almost inevitably falls upon the DM's shoulders. Prepping the game need not include prepping the players. It's also simpler for all other players - they know when there is a game they're meant to be playing. We say "scheduling sessions". Having them on an actual schedule makes this much easier. You know what you have planned for Monday night.

It's possible that some players who miss games may fear they'll feel excluded, and worry that they're a bit player. Absolutely not. You turn up rarely? You're a guest star. If anyone turns up, they are celebrated. However, it's unfair to the other players who have time to play to derail the whole game waiting. By playing regularly without you means it's much more likely there will be a game for you to play whenever you are available.

The group should discuss what it means for characters whose players miss a session, and what is and isn't appropriate. Ideally, the session break will provide a chance to justify their absence - after all, in *The Hobbit*, how often did Gandalf wander off? At the start of the next session the DM and player can



introduce what they've been up to. It may even be a useful springboard for the next adventure.

If that's impossible, discuss what happens to a character. Is them being removed by narrative fiat acceptable? Events such as them having to suddenly leave on a quest, or even be kidnapped are possible, if the players are willing. Alternatively, if their presence is required, discuss how they step back into the supporting cast. When their character's relevant abilities are required, they'll use them, but otherwise be quiet. Some groups may give another player a character to play. In some groups, one may discuss what's an acceptable use of their resources. While sharing a healing potion may be fine, it would be bad form to give away someone's +5 sword vs Kobolds when they were away. The group should agree that the DM and everyone will be acting in good faith, and they'll return to find their character in a recognisable state.

Even if only one player arrives to the session, play should continue. A solo-focus adventure can have a very different feel. One can consider a flashback episode to a formative part of their lives, or something intensely about their own narrative background. Consider dream sequences which feed back into the proper game, or many other. Players missing is a problem - but it is also an opportunity. Playing regularly means you have the space to explore it.

DM MISSING?

For more advanced players, you can consider playing a game even if the DM cannot attend. It's an ideal chance for a DM-curious player to step up and run a one off. One could even play another game.

LESS SAVOURY THOUGHTS

It's unlikely a good idea to talk about the other reasons why this tends to make campaigns run smoother - that someone getting a little FOMO may actually make them more likely to turn up. It's easy to skip something that isn't happening. On the other hand, if someone simply doesn't ever make it, it reveals that the game would never have been a scheduling priority - and this way the group discovers that without spending weeks of painful e-mails that reveal that player was always more interested in something else.