

PHB STYLE GUIDE

(UNOFFICIAL)

So, I'm pretty terrible at remembering how all the terminology in 5e works. In order to fix this, I'm going to compile as many of the phrasings as possible, so I don't have to drag my PHB out every two minutes.

All examples can be modified in number, rest type, etc. This style guide uses underlining to point out the important parts of given examples, and the PHB itself does not use underlining.

"USES PER DAY"

Since 5e has pretty completely abandoned the idea of "uses per day," I've gathered a collection of replacements.

"You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier. You regain all spent uses after finishing a long rest."

This is used for any ability which has a limited number of uses. Sometimes the phrase "(a minimum of once)" or "(minimum 1)" appears after the information on what modifier the number of uses is based on.

Use "(a minimum of once)" when referring to uses per rest, and "(minimum 1)" when referring to a pool of points of some kind.

"Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short rest."

"You must then finish a long rest to use this feature again."

"You can use this feature twice. You regain expended uses when you finish a short rest."

This is used for abilities which have a static number uses per "day," instead of a number based on an ability modifier.

"You can't use this feature again for 7 days."

This is infrequently used. One use of it is for the cleric's 10th level feature, Divine Intervention.

"Once you have used this feature the number of times shown for your (class) level in the feature's column of the (Class) table, you must finish a short rest before you can use this feature again."

This is another seldom used phrasing, which can be found in the barbarian's rage feature.

"Once per day when you finish a short rest, you can..."

As far as I can tell, this is one of the only things in 5e that still uses "days" instead of rests. This example is from the wizard's Arcane Recovery feature.

LEVELING UP FEATURES

Several features include phrases stating that they increase in power at certain higher levels. Again, I've left the numbers in.

"Starting at 3rd level, you can use this feature an extra two times before a long rest."

"You can use this feature three times per long rest starting at 7th level and five times per long rest starting at 13th level."

This allows for a static increase of uses per level, rather than relying on ability modifiers. The first statement is used for features that increase in power only once, while the second statement is for those that increase at several different levels.

"At 9th level, you..."

"At 8th level, you choose an additional..."

These are used for general improvements in a feature at higher levels. The first is generally for features which gain additional powers at higher levels. The second is for features that allow you to pick from a list of effects, like Fighting Styles or the rogue's Expertise feature. (*see note 1*)

GENERAL STYLE

As with all internally consistent documents, the PHB has a certain style guide of some sort. This is just based off of what I can see, as I don't have access to their actual guidelines.

The important words/phrases in each example are underlined, but as far as I know, the PHB does not use underlining at all.

CAPITALIZATION

Races and Languages. The names of the races are never capitalized. The names of languages, including dialects, are always capitalized.

Alignments. The terms for the alignments are never capitalized, though they are sometimes abbreviated. This abbreviation does not seem to be used except for in tables, rather than text.

Ex. "Those of a lawful good (LG) alignment are generally disgusted by necromancy."

Classes. The names of the classes are never capitalized. However, you can frequently find the names of classes capitalized in their respective sections. These capitalized instances actually reflect the rules regarding Tables. Thus, when referring to a class table, that name is capitalized as the name of a table, not as the name of the class. (*see note 2*)

Ex. "When singing, many bards weave gentle magic

into their lyrics.”

Ex. “When picking spells, refer to the paladin spell list.”

Ex. “The Spells Known column of the Sorcerer table shows when you learn more sorcerer spells of your choice.”

Class/Background Features. The names of class features are always capitalized. This does not apply to the spellcasting, ritual spellcasting, or rage features.

Ex. “The cleric has access to the spellcasting, ritual spellcasting, and Channel Divinity features.”

Class Archetypes. The names of various class archetypes are always capitalized. This goes both for archetypes that seem to be proper nouns or names of organizations, as well as those archetypes which are more like jobs than titles. (see note 3)

Ex. “An Oath of Devotion paladin would likely not get along well with an Arcane Trickster rogue.”

Spells and Magic Items. The names of spells and magic items are never capitalized, and the name itself is written in italics. The one exception is when a spell or item contains a proper noun in its name, in which case only that noun is capitalized. Furthermore, if a magic item is unique (like an artifact) and has a proper name, then that is also capitalized.

Ex. “Casting dispel magic can nullify many harmful effects, like that of an opponent’s ring of feather falling.”

Ex. “When in need of a weapon, Mordenkainen’s sword is an excellent choice.”

Ex. “Finding the Wand of Orcus can be a blessing or a curse.”

Ability Scores and Skill Checks. The names of different ability scores (Charisma, Dexterity, etc) are always capitalized. This includes when the ability scores are mentioned in the context of saving throws and skill checks. The skills themselves are also always capitalized, and also enclosed inside parenthesis.

Ex. “Make a Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak past the guard.”

Combat Actions. The terms used for various types of actions you can take on your turn are all capitalized, and generally include the word “action” after them. The terms used for different parts of the turn (action, bonus action, reaction) are not capitalized.

Ex. “Rogues can use a bonus action on each of their turns. One thing they can do with this is to take the Hide action.”

Tables. The names of different tables (such as class tables, trait tables, etc) are always capitalized. Individual column names are also capitalized.

Ex. “You learn additional wizard cantrips of your choice at higher levels, as shown in the Cantrips Known column of the Wizard table.”

PHRASING

I couldn’t think of a better way to say this, but this is the way the PHB refers to various things.

Levels. When referring to levels, the format puts the number first, followed by the word “level.” The suffix on the letter (like “nd” or “th”) is not in superscript (as many word processors default to). This also applies when referring to a player or non-player character.

Ex. “Beginning at 11th level, you may cast certain 1st level spells without expending a spell slot.”

Ex. “Fighting a 20th level paladin is quite challenging.”

Spellcasting. The use of spells has different formats depending on context. A spell is “cast,” while spell slots are “expended.” Not every ability that expends a spell slot is casting an actual spell, thus necessitating the distinction.

Ex. “A paladin can expend a spell slot to either use her Divine Smite class feature, or to cast a spell from the Paladin spell list.”

Immersion. One key philosophy in this edition seems to be keeping the feeling of immersion intact throughout as much of the documentation as possible. This means that nearly every race, class, feature, and spell includes at least a short flavor-focused description.

To this end, the PHB attempts to avoid sounding too much like an MMO by often not referring to features and abilities by their proper name, unless the text is specifically referring to the mechanics of the feature. Both of the following examples are from the same feature, to give a better idea of where the distinction lies.

Ex. “At 2nd level, you gain the ability to channel divine energy directly from your deity.”

Ex. “When you use your Channel Divinity, you choose which effect to create.”

Also remember that nearly every race, class, feature, spell, and item begins with an immersive, roleplay-focused description of the traits or effects of the topic, which is written in a looser, more narrative-like style than other parts of the handbook. After these first few sentences, the PHB shifts into a more rulebook-like style to detail the gameplay effects and stats of the topic.

Ex. “The rites of your circle grant you the ability to transform into more dangerous animal forms. Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Wild Shape to transform into a beast with a challenge range as high as 1.”

FORMATTING

For info on the actual resources and assets used in the PHB, check out templates like /u/AshenGT’s Word template (which I’m currently using), and any of several great PDF templates.

This section deals with the structure of text, what types of effects go on what, and the general look of the PHB.

Paragraph Formatting. The format taken by paragraphs involves leaving the first paragraph of a section un-

indented, and then placing a three-space indentation at the beginning of all subsequent paragraphs.

As doing an example for this would be difficult, I'm making the notes about the format serve as the example itself. So this second paragraph is mostly just to demonstrate.

You may also notice some paragraphs are more spaced out than others. This is because any single block of text is created with no paragraph spacing between the paragraphs. Meanwhile, paragraphs in separate blocks of text have a small gap between them and the preceding block of text.

This practice can be seen in the following paragraphs as well. Since this paragraph and the one immediately preceding it are connected in purpose, topic, and form, they're separated from the first two paragraphs of this section.

Mini-Sections. The format for creating sections without using large headers is complicated enough to warrant its own section. When creating mini-sections, the small header consists of a phrase that is bolded and italicized, with a period at the end. This phrase also follows normal title capitalization.

You can see this format in use throughout the rest of the General Style section, where each mini-header is begun in the correct style. The following example presents the mini-header out of context for clarity.

Ex. "***Ability Score Increase.***"

Stats Headers. When denoting states such as hit points per level, range of spells, or other similar concepts, the header is bolded but not italicized, and the header ends with a colon, not a period.

Ex. "**Saving Throws:** Wisdom, Charisma"

Ex. "**Casting Time:** 1 action"

Bold Text. Besides use in the headers of mini-sections or other in-line headers, bolded text is employed point out important gameplay mechanics within larger blocks of text.

These bolded sections of text are not necessarily capitalized, unless they would be capitalized under normal English rules.

Ex. "If a creature or object has **resistance** to a damage type, damage of that type is halved against it."

Ex. "**Spell attack modifier** = your proficiency bonus + your intelligence modifier"

Italicized Text. Besides use in the headers of mini-sections, italicized text is also used in the names of spells and magic items, as well as when noting prerequisites required to take a feature or the level and school of a spell.

Italicized text is also used in the book quotations at the beginning of each race's section. An example of how to format those excerpts is included later under its own section.

Ex. "The spell *magic missile* is iconic to the wizard class."

Ex. "*Prerequisite: Pact of the Chain feature.*"

Underlined Text. This effect is not used anywhere inside the PHB. This style guide uses underlining to point out what part of an example is relevant to the issue being discussed.

Again, just to be absolutely clear: the PHB does not use underlining. All underlining found in this style guide is meant to help point out the important parts of given examples, and does not reflect how the actual PHB style does things.

Dropped and Small Capitals. At the beginning of each chapter, the first line of text begins with a dropped capital (the big, fancy, colored letter), and the rest of the top line is written in small caps.

At the beginning of each race's section, the first line of the book quotation is written in small caps, but the first letter of this line is not a dropped capital.

Book Excerpts. Each race's section begins with an excerpt from a D&D official novel which focuses on a member of that race. These excerpts generally try to capture a few key traits of the race in the context of an individual.

These excerpts are formatted in a very specific way. The entire body of the excerpt is written in italicized text and features no quotation marks. This block of text also uses 1.5 spacing, unlike all other text in the PHB.

I will note that this example is likely not perfectly formatted. The author attribution is likely offset slightly, and I found making the first line into small caps to be very awkward. So treat this less as a perfect example and more as a vague tool for getting the feel down.

Ex.

"I'M TOO LAZY TO LOOK FOR AN ACTUAL QUOTE FROM A D&D book to put here, so have this instead," said the compiler. Anathemys, a writer so lazy most expected him to sleep through the apocalypse itself, then settled down for the day. Or, rather, for a quite long rest.

-Anathemys, *PHB (Unofficial) Style Guide*

Line Spacing. Except for in the novel excerpts, all of the text in the PHB is single-spaced. Those novel excerpts use 1.5 spacing.

After switching that previous section's example to 1.5 spacing, and then switching this section back to single-spacing, I have never stared at the gap between lines harder. I'm still somewhat suspicious.

Nouns. The PHB switches the subject of sentences depending on what section it is. When talking about classes or races before the character creation details, the PHB refers to these classes and races in the third person. This also applies to when the PHB details gameplay mechanics like combat.

Ex. "Many monks study for years in hidden monasteries on the edge of civilization, until they master their abilities."

Meanwhile, once the character creation process has begun and the PHB begins detailing class features, the text begins speaking in the second-person. This continues to apply for backgrounds, feats, and other character creation subjects.

Ex. "The Warlock table shows how many spell slots you have."

NOTES

There are some things about the PHB style that I admit to not understanding. If anyone has a better comprehension of the mechanics than me, feel free to explain.

1. The monk's Unarmored Movement feature uses this wording to state that the feature gains additional effects at a higher level. Yet the paladin's Improved Divine Smite feature is separate from the original Divine Smite feature. I believe it may be related to length; the improvements made to the Unarmored Movement feature at a higher level consist of only one sentence, while the improvements made to the Divine Smite feature at a higher level consists of several sentences.
2. The capitalization of class names seems incredibly complicated at first glance. I actually got the rules wrong in the first edition of this style guide, but I've since taken another look at things. The main issue is the frequency with which class names appear as the names of tables associated with that class. Since the names of tables are always capitalized, these instances of class names are too. However, whenever there isn't another reason to capitalize the word, the names of classes are not capitalized.
3. I'm assuming here that all class archetypes are meant to be capitalized, but that many times the phrasing of the sections don't allow for mentioning that fact. I can find examples of most class archetypes being capitalized, but not all of them. So, for anyone who's curious, I've included a list below that breaks down which classes I've found examples for, and which ones I haven't.
 - a. **Classes with Examples:** Barbarian, Bard, Cleric (assumed), Druid, Fighter, Monk, Paladin, Ranger
 - b. **Classes with Partial Examples:** Warlock
 - c. **Classes with No Examples:** Rogue, Sorcerer, Wizard