

Starship Combat



Thanks for reading these homebrew rules for starship combat in 5e by DM Rob and DM Matt of [Dungeon Master of None](#). Feel free to use it in your game and, if you have time, [let us know how it goes](#). Check out our podcast for more cool RPG stuff!

Lasers and missiles streaking across the stars. A desperate chase through an asteroid field. A group of starfighters attempt to hold back a monster that blots out the sun. Starship combat can be deadly and exciting.

This document provides the basic rules for when ships and space monsters engage in a dogfight, an explorer encounters an anomaly, or two massive fleets face off. In starship combat players control their characters as a pilot at the helm, a gunner in a turret, or part of ship's crew.

These rules assume that combat is played out on a hex map with each ship's location, speed, and facing tracked each round. For some combats or styles a play, a GM may opt for a more simple resolution to combat. If a more simple resolution is desired, use "Option 3 (Theater of the Mind)" under the ship movement phase rules.

The Order of Combat

The game organizes starship combat into a cycle of rounds and turns. A **round** represents about 6 seconds in the game world. During a round, each ship moves and flies, and each participant takes a **turn**. The round is further divided into two **phases**. In the **action phase**, play proceeds much as it does in non-ship combat, with individual characters taking their turns (in which they can move, attack, and take control station actions). In the **ship movement phase**, each ship then moves around the game board. The combat continues if neither side has defeated the other.

Surprise

The DM determines surprise. Crews of ships that are ambushed or don't notice a threat or a hidden ship don't take a turn in the first round (thought they can continue moving as normal).

Initiative

Initiative determines the order of turns during combat. When combat starts, every ship that participates determines their initiative score. A ship's Initiative Score = 10 + Charisma Modifier of the ship's captain + Ship's Proficiency Bonus + Ship's Size bonus.

Option: Have each ship's pilot make an Dexterity (Piloting) check. This determines initiative order, starting with the lowest result and ending with the highest. Use this with "Option 2" in the ship movement phase.

If a tie occurs, the GM decides the order among tied GM-controlled ships, and the players decide the order among their tied ships.

Action phase

Each ship's crew, in order of their initiative score, takes their actions. Crews take their actions on the same initiative score but can and should discuss the order that their actions occur in. Players who are part of the same ship's crew must work together to fly their ship well.

Ship movement phase

At the end of each round, every ship (even surprised ships) moves its speed and ships that are piloted can turn, change facing, or accelerate or decelerate. (See "Movement" below).

Option 1: Simultaneous movement. After each ship's action phase, the crew of a ship decides where it will move but does not place the ship there. This option adds some strategic thinking as crews try to outguess the enemy.

Option 2: After every ship takes its action phase, each ship moves proceeding in reverse initiative score order (lowest score to highest score). This option makes things simpler and rewards ships with a high initiative score as moving last provides a strategic advantage.

Option 3 (Theater of the Mind): Every ship's pilot makes a Dexterity (Piloting) check and adds their ship's speed, maneuverability, acceleration ratings and proficiency bonus to the result. The ship with the highest result is considered to be "on the tail" of the other ship or in another advantageous position as determined by the GM. Alternatively, players or crews might state their goals in the movement phase and the crew with the highest check successfully achieves this goal. This option allows for a more free-form narrative that takes less time. If using this option, the GM should creatively describe the results of the ship's maneuvering and describe the new layout of the battle to players as the next round begins.

Control Stations

Ships have a consoles and control stations where crew members can input commands. Small ships, such as snub fighters, have only one or two stations, medium ships typically have four to six stations, while larger capital ships can have dozens of stations. Some weapons, such as guns mounted on turrets, also have a stations.

Actions by crew members are limited by the number of available stations and the number of crew. For example, while the pilot of single-seat fighter can use the universal station to control sensors, maneuver, or make repairs on the simple vessel, the pilot cannot make more than one action per turn (as there is only one station to use). A ship with a crew of four and five control stations, could make four actions on the ship's turn.

Example stations on a typical all-purpose freighter:

-Piloting: a control joystick and throttle at the front of the ship. A spelljammer helm. A ship's rudder or wheel.

-Engineering: a control computer next to the ship's reactor, shields, thrusters, and plane shift drive.

-Science: a computer console that controls the ship's scanners and targeting sensors.

-Spellcasting: magically-tempered transparent glass that allows a spellcaster to fire spells at enemy targets

-Main Weapons: Aiming controls for fixed guns and missiles. A ships broadside cannons.

-Weapon Turret 1: Controls for a turret mounted guns.

-Weapon Turret 2: : Controls for a turret mounted guns.

-Command: A overall command station to coordinate the crews efforts.

Actions in Starship Combat

When you take your action on your ship's turn, you can take one of the actions presented here, an action you gained from your class or a special feature, or an action that you improvise. Some ships have action options of their own in their stat blocks.

When you describe an action not detailed elsewhere in the rules, the GM tells you whether that action is possible and what kind of roll you need to make, if any, to determine success or failure.

Attack

Station: Weapons, Piloting (Main weapons only)

The most common action to take in combat is the Attack action, whether you are swinging a sword, firing an arrow from a bow, or brawling with your fists.

With this action, you make one starship attack. See the "Making an Attack" section for the rules that govern attacks.

Certain features, such as the Extra Weapon feature of a ship, allow you to make more than one attack with this action.

Aid

Station: Command

You can lend your aid to another creature in the completion of a task. When you take the Aid action, the creature you aid gains advantage on the next station action check it makes.

Alternatively, you can aid a friendly ship in attacking a creature within 1 hex of your ship. You feint, distract the target, or in some other way team up to make your ally's ship's attack more effective. If your ally attacks the target before your next turn, the first attack roll is made with advantage. *Note: Consuls do not need a "Command" station to use the Aid action.*

Analyze

Station: Science

When you take the Analyze action, you devote your ship's sensors to analyzing something.

Depending on the nature of your analysis, the GM might have you make a Computer Use (Intelligence) check, Perception (Wisdom), Insight (Wisdom), Physical Science (Intelligence) or an Intelligence (Investigation) check. If successful against an enemy check, you can learn one of the following (at the GM's discretion): the target's shield strength, the target's speed or heading.

Boost

Station: Engineering

When you take the Boost action, you temporarily Increase your ship's maximum speed, acceleration, boost weapons, or recharge shields. If you boost power to the ship's engine you may increase the ships maximum speed, acceleration, or maneuverability by 1 next turn. If you boost power to the ship's weapons a gunner may reroll one damage die next turn.

Cast a Spell

Station: Spellcasting

Spellcasters such as wizards and clerics, as well as many monsters, have access to spells and can use them to great effect in combat. Each spell has a casting time, which specifies whether the caster must use an action, a reaction, minutes, or even hours to cast the spell. Casting a spell is, therefore, not necessarily an action. Most spells do have a casting time of 1 action, so a spellcaster often uses his or her action in combat to cast such a spell.

Dodge

Station: Piloting

When you take the Dodge action, you focus entirely on avoiding attacks. Until the start of your ship's next turn, any attack roll made against your ship has disadvantage if your crew is aware of the attacker, and your ship makes Dexterity saving throws with advantage. Any attacks made from your ship are made at disadvantage. You lose this benefit if your ship is incapacitated or if its speed drops to 0 hexes.

Hide

Station: Piloting, Science

When you take the Hide action, you make a Dexterity (Piloting) check in an attempt to hide, following the rules for hiding, i.e. you must have a special ship ability or cover to hide. If you succeed, you gain certain benefits, as described in the "Unseen Attackers and Targets" section of the SRD.

Jam

Station: Science

When you take the Jam action, you devote your ship's sensors to blocking incoming scans and locks. You can oppose an enemy scan with a Intelligence (Computer Use) check.

Push

Station: Piloting

When you take the Push action, you attempt to fly your ship beyond its normal capabilities. When it is time for your ship to move, you must make a check to see if your maneuver was successful. To successfully push your ship you must make a Dexterity (Piloting) or Dexterity (Vehicles) equal to a target number set by the GM. Typically, this number is determined by how much you push your ship beyond its basic speed, acceleration and maneuverability. The GM adds these together and consults the chart below. For example, if you plot a ship movement that is 1 hex above your ship's maximum speed, 1 above your ship's acceleration, and 1 above your ship's maneuverability, then your DC is 25. *Note: Huge and larger ships always have disadvantage on rolls to push their craft.*

DC: Beyond 1 = 15

DC: Beyond 2 = 20

DC: Beyond 3 = 25

DC: Beyond 4 = 30

If you fail a push, the GM determines where and in what direction your ship ends up and whether your ship takes damage from the stress.

Repair

Station: Engineering

Repair a damaged critical system You make an Intelligence (Engineering) check against the damaged system's repair DC.

Reroute Shields

Station: Engineering

When you take the Reroute Shields action, you configure your ship's shields to better defend against attacks. At the start of the next turn, you may redistribute any of the shields hit points among its four arrays: bow, port, starboard, and aft.

Scan

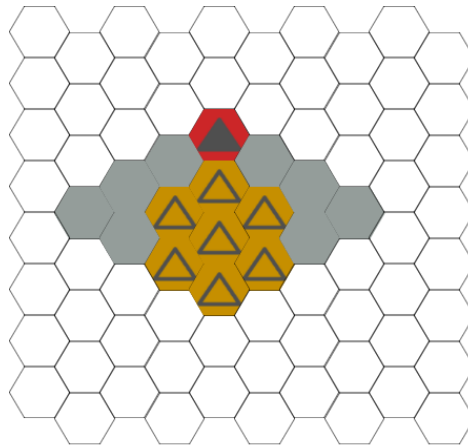
Station: Science

When you take the Scan action, you devote your ship's sensors attention to finding something. Depending on the nature of your search, the GM might have you make a Computer Use (Intelligence) check, Perception (Wisdom), Insight (Wisdom), Physical Science (Intelligence) or an Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Tail

Station: Piloting

When you take the Tail action, you attempt to follow and predict the course of the target ship that you are within 3 Hexes + rear arc. You make a Wisdom (Piloting) check opposed by an enemy pilot's Wisdom (Piloting) check. If successful this ship must declare its move before all other ships move.



Valid tailing hexes

Target Lock

Station: Science

When you take the Target Lock action, you devote your ship's sensor attention to tracking an enemy target. You make a Intelligence (Computer Use) check opposed by an enemy captain's Wisdom saving throw. If successful you can remove the disadvantage imposed by deflection, remove the range penalty on an attack, grant advantage if you are trailing an enemy ship, or target a specific system of an enemy ship. When using a target lock to attack a specific system, the enemy ship's engineer must make a Wisdom saving throw or the system is disabled equal to half of the HP damage dealt by attack.

Use an Object or Ship Ability

You normally interact with an object while doing something else, such as when you draw a sword as part of an attack. When an object requires your action for its use, you take the Use an Object action. This action is also useful when you want to interact with more than one object on your turn. Some ships have special abilities, such as *Plane Shift Drive*, that require that you take an action to use.

Starship movement (Hex Combat)

Movement and Position

In combat, ships are in constant motion, often using movement and position to gain the upper hand. The crew, or just the captain, of a ship can decide where to move your ship. Unless you accelerate or decelerate you move a distance in hexes equal to your speed.

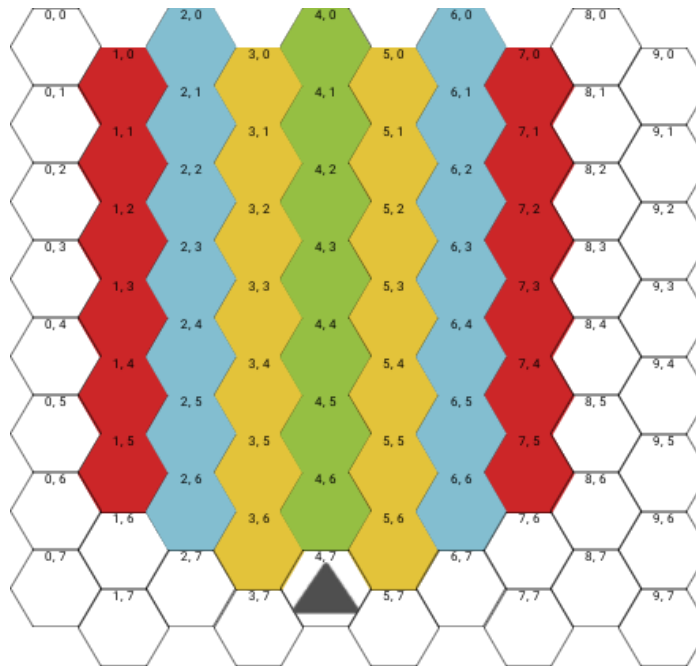
Starships have three ratings that determine their movement in a round of starship combat: maximum speed, acceleration, and maneuverability.

Maximum speed: the maximum number of hexes a starship can move in a turn

Acceleration: the number of hexes a starship can accelerate or decelerate in a turn.

Maneuverability: The number of hexes a starship can turn to one side or another.

(Maneuverability 1=green, 2=yellow, 3=blue, 4=red) (two of each)



Maneuverability Chart

Facing - Ships can change facing only in the direction that a ship turns

Maneuverability chart:

- 1 Green: Your ship ends its move facing forward or 1 hex turn to either side.
- 2 Yellow: Your ship ends its move facing forward or 1 hex turn in the direction of the turn.
- 3 Blue: Your ship ends its move facing 1 hex or 2 hex turns in the direction of the turn.
- 4 Red: Your ship ends its move facing 2 hex or 3 hex turns in the direction of the turn.

Special move: If ship has a speed of 0 (and is not incapacitated), it can change to any facing with no push roll needed.

Special move: Immelman, a ship can reverse its facing completely (180 degrees or 3 hex changes) in the green hexes. This requires a maneuverability of 4 and reduces the total hexes moved by 2.

Adjusting Ship Movement Rules

Option 1: All ships declare their movement at the same time. Then, player's and crew take their actions.

Option 2: All ships roll Initiative (Captain's Charisma bonus) and take turns in reverse order. Then, player's and crew take their actions.

Making an Attack

Whether you're striking with a melee weapon, firing a weapon at range, or making an attack roll as part of a spell, an attack has a simple structure.

1. Choose a target. Pick a target within your attack's range: a creature, an object, or a location.
2. Determine modifiers. The GM determines whether the target has cover and whether you have advantage or disadvantage against the target. In addition, spells, special abilities, and other effects can apply penalties or bonuses to your attack roll.
3. Resolve the attack. You make the attack roll. On a hit, you roll damage, unless the particular attack has rules that specify otherwise. Some attacks cause special effects in addition to or instead of damage.

If there's ever any question whether something you're doing counts as an attack, the rule is simple: if you're making an attack roll, you're making an attack.

Attack Rolls

When you make an attack, your attack roll determines whether the attack hits or misses. To make an attack roll, roll a d20 and add the appropriate modifiers. If the total of the roll plus modifiers equals or exceeds the target's Armor Class (AC), the attack hits. The AC of a character is determined at character creation, whereas the AC of a monster is in its stat block.

Modifiers to the Roll

When a character makes an attack roll, the two most common modifiers to the roll are an ability modifier and the character's proficiency bonus. When a monster makes an attack roll, it uses whatever modifier is provided in its stat block.

Ability Modifier. The ability modifier used for a starship weapon attack is Dexterity.

Proficiency Bonus. You add your proficiency bonus to your attack roll when you attack using a weapon with which you have proficiency, as well as when you attack with a spell.

Ship Proficiency Bonus. You add your ship's proficiency bonus to your attack roll when you attack using a ship weapon.

Range Penalty. You subtract the range (in hexes) from your ship to the target. Attacks made ships in the same hex as your ship have no range penalty. *Note: Target locks can eliminate range penalties.*

Attacking stationary targets. You have advantage on Attack Rolls against stationary (speed 0) ships and objects.

Deflection

The relative movement of your targets to your ship can increase or decrease your chance to hit.

Side. Disadvantage. No penalty if target locked.

Behind/Stationary. No penalty. Advantage if target locked.

Front. No penalty. No benefit if target locked.

Option: Deflection as cover

There are TWO degrees of deflection.

A target from the front has +2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws. (same as half cover)

A target from the side +5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws. (same as 3/4 cover)

Rolling 1 or 20

Sometimes fate blesses or curses a combatant, causing the novice to hit and the veteran to miss.

If the d20 roll for an attack is a 20, the attack hits regardless of any modifiers or the target's AC.

This is called a critical hit, which is explained later in this chapter.

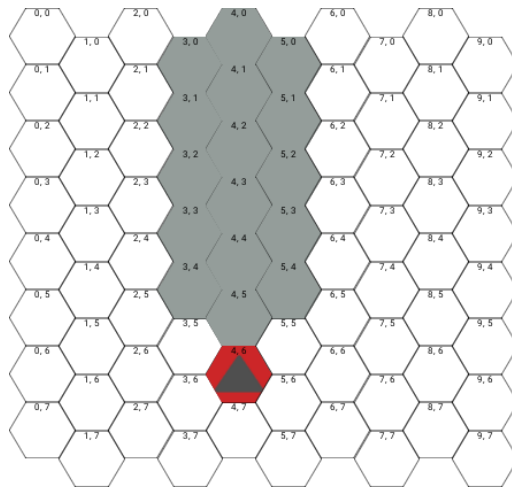
If the d20 roll for an attack is a 1, the attack misses regardless of any modifiers or the target's AC.

Ship weapons

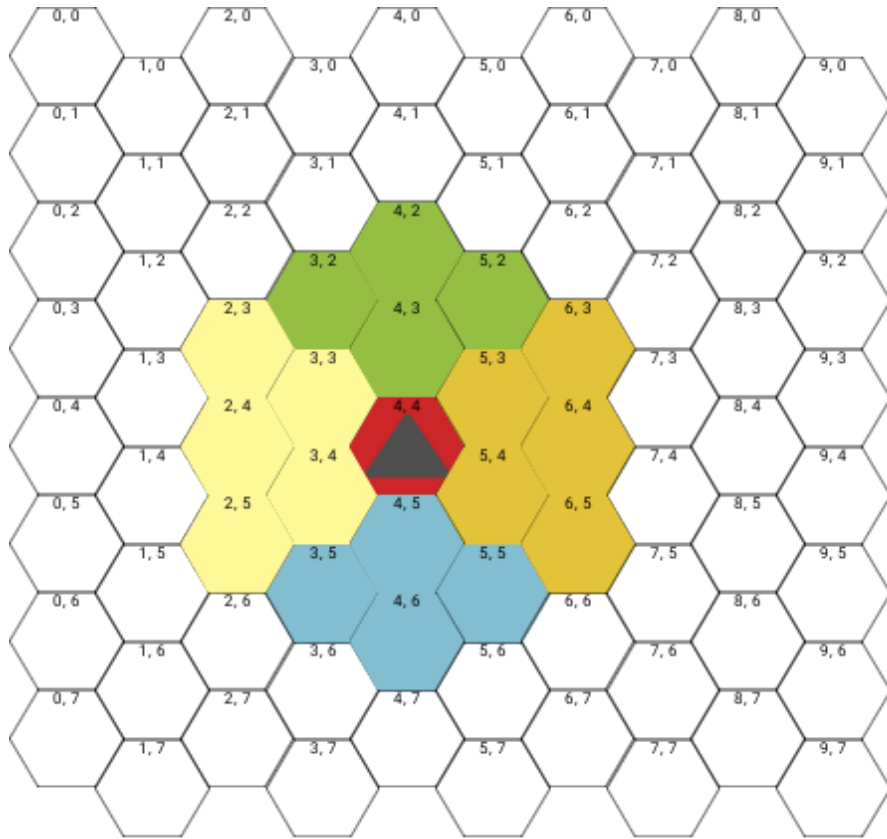
Main Weapons - can only fire forward (as shown in the diagram)

Arc Turret - can only fire in a single arc (as shown in the diagram)

Full Turret - can fire in any direction



Main weapons



Arcs for shields, deflection and turrets

Warheads

Warheads are launched at speed towards their target at their speed. The target ship must make a Dexterity saving throw when the warhead reaches the target hex to avoid being hit.

Starship sizes:

Tiny: A human, a torpedo, probe, or a drone (Initiative Bonus +4)

Small: a starfighter (an x-wing or a viper), one or two pilots (Initiative Bonus +2)

Medium: a freighter or a gunboat (the millennium falcon or the serenity), a crew of 3-6 (Initiative Bonus +0)

Large: a light capital ship, a destroyer or a cruiser or a heavy cargo ship (Initiative Bonus -2)

Huge: a heavy capital ship, a battleship or a carrier (Initiative Bonus -4)

Gargantuan: a flagship, a giant space station (Initiative Bonus -10)

Starship AC

Starship AC = 10 + Acceleration + Maneuverability + Proficiency Bonus

Critical Hits

When you score a critical hit, you get to roll extra dice for the attack's damage against the target. Roll all of the attack's damage dice twice and add them together. Then add any relevant modifiers as normal. To speed up play, you can roll all the damage dice at once.

Alternatively, if you hit an unshielded ship with a ship weapon attack, you may instead choose to damage a ship's systems.

System Damage (Optional Rule)

Whenever a ship loses 1/4 of its HP, 1/2 of its HP, and 3/4 of its HP

Example Ships

Qwertian Caravel

Ship	Caravel (all-purpose freighter)
Size	Medium
Proficiency Bonus	+2
Speed	6 hexes
Acceleration	1 hex
Maneuverability	2 hexes
Crew	4 (plus passengers 6)
AC	15
HP	300
Shields (B/S/P/A)	20/20/20/20
Propulsion	Gravity induction drive, <i>plane shift</i> drive (mk. 1)
Stations	Piloting, Weapons, Science, Engineering, Shields, Weapon Turrets (2)
Weapons	Duel Laser Cannons 33/6d10 radiant (Main weapon), Missile launcher 22/4d10 fire (warhead), Dorsel Quad Turret 22/4d10 radiant (full turret), Ventral Quad Turret 22/4d10

Draconic Empire Wyrmling

Ship	Wyrmling (single seat fighter)
Size	Small
Proficiency Bonus	+2
Speed	8 hexes
Acceleration	2 hex
Maneuverability	3 hexes
Crew	1 (plus passenger 1)
AC	17
HP	50
Shields	10/10/10/10
Propulsion	Gravity induction drive
Stations	Universal station
Weapons	Single Laser Cannons 16/3d10 radiant (Main weapon), Missile launcher 22/4d10 fire (warhead)

Draconian Wyvern

Ship	Wyvern (basic shuttle)
Size	Medium
Proficiency Bonus	+2
Speed	6 hexes
Acceleration	2 hexes
Maneuverability	2 hexes
Crew	3 (plus passengers 3)
AC	16
HP	100
Shields (B/S/P/A)	20/20/20/20
Propulsion	Gravity induction drive, <i>plane shift</i> drive (mk. 1)
Stations	Piloting, Science/Engineering/Shields, Weapon Turret (1)
Weapons	Ventral Dual Turret 22/4d10

