

The rules and interactions

Morph: *Onslaught's* New Ability



Paul Barclay, TCG Rules Manager


Friday, September 06, 2002


- 
- 



- [Paul Barclay, TCG Rules Manager Archive](#)

Normally, the job of the rules team is to protect the unsuspecting public from the crazy schemes of designers such as Mike Elliott, Bill Rose, Mark Rosewater, and Brian Tinsman. But now we've created a work of evil genius of our very own. It's an ability called "morph," which allows you to play creatures with the ability face down. The card text for morph looks like this: "Morph  (You may play this face down as a 2/2 creature for . Turn it face up any time for its morph cost.)"

When you play a creature card with morph face down, you pay  to play it. Don't show it to your opponent – he or she doesn't get to know what it is. It goes on the stack like any other spell, so your opponent can respond to or counter it, again, without knowing what it is.

When the spell resolves, it comes into play as a face-down creature. All face-down creatures are exactly the same. They're 2/2 colorless, nameless, typeless creatures with no abilities. Their mana cost is . And, your opponent has no idea what your face-down creatures are.

Who can look at face-down creatures?

You can look at any face-down creatures you control. You can't look at any your opponents control. Also, whenever a face-down creature leaves play, it's revealed to everyone. At the end of the game, any face-down creatures in play are revealed to everyone. This prevents people cheating by playing cards without morph face down.

Once you have a face-down creature in play, you have the option to turn it face up. You can do this any time you have priority. Just pay the morph cost, and turn it face up. This isn't an activated ability, and doesn't use the stack, so your opponent can't respond to it or counter it.

Why can't my opponent respond to me turning a creature face up?

Partly because it would suck if you paid  to turn your creature face up, and your opponent



Blistering Firecat was previewed in the last issue of the Sideboard magazine.

responded with a Shock to kill the 2/2 face-down creature. Partly because it would be difficult to confirm that you had paid the correct amount of mana without turning the card face up to prove it. Your 6/6 creature will always survive your opponent's Shock, as long as you have enough mana.

So now you know the basics. Read on to find out answers to all your questions, and to see the official rules for morph.

Common Questions

What happens if there's more than one face-down creature in play?

You have to make sure that your opponent knows what order they came into play. The best way to do this is to mark them with dice. You can't shuffle them around, or do anything else to try to confuse your opponent. No "Three-Card Monte before blockers are declared." Such actions are punishable quite heavily in sanctioned events, and I expect all head judges to go over the floor rules with the players on Prerelease day.

Can I give my face-down creature a creature type or a color with Unnatural Selection or Tidal Visionary?

Yes. You can do both. Normally, face-down creatures don't have either, but you can do anything to them that you can do to a regular creature. When you turn the creature face-up, any changes you've made to it still apply. If you turned it red, it's still red. If you turned it into a Zombie, it's still a Zombie. If you put a +1/+1 counter or an enchantment on it, they're still there too.

What happens if I gave my face-down creature +3/+3 before turning it face up?

The +3/+3 will apply to the new power and toughness. So, if the face-up creature is naturally a 4/3, the result will be a 7/6 creature.

If I turn a creature face up, does it have "summoning sickness"?

Not unless it was "sick" when it was face-down. Turning a creature face-up doesn't change when it came into play. It also doesn't change whether it's tapped or untapped.

I gain control of my opponent's face-down creature. Can I turn it face up?

Yes. As long as you control it, you can look at it (because you control it), and you can turn it face up by paying its morph cost.

What happens if I return my opponent's face-down creature to his hand?

Whenever a face-down creature leaves play, it's revealed to everyone. Also, at the end of the game, any face-down creatures in play are revealed to everyone. This helps to prevent cheating.

What happens if I use Faceless Butcher to remove a face-down creature from the game?

The creature will be removed and turned face-up, so you'll see what it is. When the Butcher leaves play, the face-up creature will return to play. Face up. So, if it's a 6/6, your opponent's going to be sorry she played the Butcher.

How will morph work on *Magic: The Gathering Online*?

It'll work just like it does in real life. The computer will even help you a little by keeping track of your different face-down creatures for you.

Can I turn a creature spell face up while it's on the stack?

No, you can't turn face-down spells on the stack face up.

What happens if I turn a creature face up while combat damage is on the stack?

It will still do 2 damage (because the damage is locked in already). But if that creature has an ability which triggers "whenever this creature deals combat damage," that ability will trigger when the combat damage resolves.

What happens if I turn my creature face up in response to a spell that targets it?

If a face-down creature is targeted by a spell or ability on the stack and the creature is turned face up, the spell or ability targets the face-up creature. Check to see if the creature is a legal target when the spell or ability resolves.

Can I counter a face-down creature spell?

Yes. A face-down creature spell can be countered just like any other creature spell.

Uncommon Questions

Does a face-down creature have the "morph" ability?

Face-down creatures don't have any abilities, so they aren't considered to have the morph ability. They just have an effect on them that allows you to pay their morph cost to turn them face up. Face-up creatures with morph do have the ability.

What happens if I try to copy a face-down creature?

You get a face-up 2/2 colorless, nameless, typeless creature. It does not have morph and cannot be turned into something else. What the original card is when it's face-up is irrelevant.

Will a Meddling Mage set to "Blistering Firecat" prevent me from playing the Firecat face down?

No. You can play the spell face down, but not face up. A face-down spell has no name, and isn't affected by the Mage.

If I have Yawgmoth's Agenda in play, can I play a morph creature from my graveyard face down?

Yes. Of course, your opponent will know what it is.

What happens when a face-down creature phases out?

If a face-down creature phases out, it stays face down, and it stays face down when it phases back in. But we won't mention anything more about Phasing here.

How do Illusionary Mask and Camouflage work now?

At the moment, they don't work very well. We're releasing errata for both these cards in the next Oracle update, in less than three weeks time.

The Official Rules for Morph

502.26. Morph

502.26a Morph is a static ability that functions any time you could play the card it's on, and the morph effect works until you turn the card face up. The phrase "Morph [cost]" means "You may play this card as a 2/2 face-down creature, with no text, no name, no subtypes, no expansion symbol, and a mana cost of ①, by paying ③ rather than its mana cost." Any time you could play an instant, you may show all players the morph cost of any face-down permanent you control, pay that cost, then turn the permanent face up. This action does not use the stack.

502.26b To play a spell using its morph ability, turn it face down. It becomes a 2/2 face-down creature spell, with no text, no name, no subtypes, no expansion symbol, and a mana cost of ①. Put it onto the stack (it stays face-down with the same characteristics), and pay ③ rather than pay its mana cost. You can use morph to play a spell from any zone from which you could normally play that spell. When the spell resolves, it comes into play with the same characteristics the spell had. The morph effect continues until the permanent is turned face up.

502.26c You can't play a card face down if it doesn't have morph.

502.26d Any time you could play an instant, you may turn a face-down permanent you control face up. To do this, show all players the permanent's morph cost, pay that cost, then turn the permanent face up. The morph effect on it ends, and it regains the card's normal characteristics. Any abilities relating to the permanent coming into play don't trigger when it's turned face up and don't have any effect, because the permanent has already come into play.

502.26e If a face-up permanent is turned face down by a spell or ability, it becomes a 2/2 face-down creature, with no text, no name, no subtypes, no expansion symbol, a mana cost of ①. The rules for morph and face-down spells and permanents apply to it normally.

502.26f See rule 504, "Face-Down Spells and Permanents," for more information on how to play cards with morph.

504. Face-Down Spells and Permanents

504.1. Two old cards ([Camouflage](#) and [Illusionary Mask](#)) and the morph ability (see rule 502.26), allow spells and permanents to be face down.

504.2. Face-down cards on the stack and face-down cards and tokens in play have no characteristics other than those listed by the card or rules that allow the card or token to be face down. Any listed characteristics are that card or token's initial characteristics. Permanents that are put into play face down are turned face down before they come into play, so the permanent's comes-into-play abilities won't trigger (if triggered) or have any effect (if static). Spells that are played face down are turned face down before they are put onto the stack, so effects that care about the characteristics of a spell will see only the face-down spell's characteristics. The cards remain face down as long as they are on the stack or in the in-play zone.

504.3. You may look at a face-down spell you control on the stack or a face-down permanent you control at any time. You can't look at face-down cards in any other zone or face-down spells or

permanents controlled by another player. The card or rules that allow a permanent to be face down may also allow the permanent's controller to turn it face up. Spells normally can't be turned face up.

504.4. If you control multiple face-down spells on the stack or face-down permanents in play, you must ensure at all times that your face-down spells and permanents can be easily differentiated from each other. This includes, but is not limited to, knowing the order spells were played, the order that face-down permanents came into play, which creature attacked last turn, and any other differences between face-down spells or permanents. Common methods for distinguishing between face-down cards include using counters or dice to mark the different permanents, or clearly placing those permanents in order on the table.

504.5. As a face-down permanent is turned face up, its initial characteristics revert to its normal initial characteristics. Any effects that have been applied to the face-down permanent still apply to the face-up permanent. Any abilities relating to the permanent coming into play don't trigger and don't have any effect, because the permanent has already come into play.

504.6. If a face-down permanent moves from the in-play zone to any zone other than the phased-out zone, its owner must reveal it to all players as he or she moves it. If a face-down spell moves from the stack to any zone other than the in-play zone, its owner must reveal it to all players as he or she moves it. At the end of each game, all face-down spells and permanents must be revealed to all players.

Send questions and comments to editor@wizards.com.