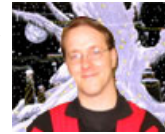




## Out For Summer, Out Forever

*John Carter*  
*Saturday School*  
 Saturday, July 1, 2006



After almost two years - more than three and half when including Mr. Horvik's tutelage, Saturday School is closing its doors. Saturday won't be without its merits though; **magicthegathering.com** has a brand new series slated to pick up the weekend timeslot.

For our last class together, we're going to do a quick review of the rules. We'll be looking specifically at conceptual highlights that make them easier to understand. We'll also cover some basic lists and mnemonic devices that help with recalling specific details. Pencils up, and let's begin...

The design of **Magic** includes a few Golden rules. They are:

### Card text trumps game rules.

If the rules and a card directly conflict, the card wins. For example, [CR 216.6b] says you can only play one land, but Exploration says you can play an extra land. Exploration wins. Be careful - the conflict must be a direct conflict. Making sorceries playable like instants ([Vedalken Orrery](#)) doesn't make abilities played like sorceries (transmute) also playable like instants.

### Can't trumps Can.

Effects that say something can happen lose out if an effect says something can't happen. For example, [Solfatara](#) stops you from playing lands on your turn even if you haven't played a land or if you have [Exploration](#) in play.

### Ignore the impossible.

Effects that give impossible instructions ignore the impossible part of the instruction. If you play [Innocent Blood](#) while you control no creatures, that effect ignores the fact you have nothing to sacrifice but will still make your opponent sacrifice. However, this doesn't let you ignore the targeting rules, and there are special exceptions that don't ignore doing the impossible (exchanges and redirections).

The game is built on phases and steps. Steps are subsections of phases. You mana burn - lose life for unspent mana - only when a phase ends, not when a step ends. The turn is structured like this:

1. Beginning phase
  - 1.1. Untap step
  - 1.2. Upkeep step
  - 1.3. Draw step
2. (First / Precombat) Main phase
3. Combat phase
  - 3.1. Beginning of combat step
  - 3.2. Declare attackers step
  - 3.3. Declare blockers step
  - 3.4. Combat damage step--add an extra combat damage step if there are first or double strikers
  - 3.5. End of combat
4. (Second / Postcombat) Main Phase
5. End Phase
  - 5.1. End of turn step
  - 5.2. Cleanup step--automatically repeats if a trigger or state-based effect happens

An easy way to help remember the structure is that **Magic** has five colors, a turn has five phases, and combat has five steps. Conveniently, the turn's phases and combat's steps begin with "beginning" and end with "end."

**Magic** is a game of cards that become something else. The same piece of paper will move in the game from one area, officially called zones, to another. As far as the game is concerned, once a card goes

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from one zone to another it's a totally new object.

The way an effect refers to something will tell you a little about where to look for it. In your hand a card is a <type> card. On the stack, that card is a <type> spell. In play, that card is a <type>. In the graveyard, the very same piece of paper is once again a <type> card. For a simple comparison, look at Ostracize, Withering Boon, Disembowel, and Raise Dead. You'll see creature card, creature spell, creature, and again creature card.

Unlike all other cards, land cards aren't played like a spell is played. Land is played by taking a special action that can be done only on your own turn, while you have priority and an empty stack, and only if you haven't played a land yet. Basic lands don't have a four-of limit like other cards. You can tell if a land is basic because it will say (or in the case of older lands, its Oracle text will say) "Basic" on the type line just under the picture. All lands with a basic land type can be tapped to add mana of the associated color to your mana pool. *Ravnica* dual lands have two basic land types, but they are not basic lands - having the type merely grants the ability to tap for that land's associated color of mana.



The stack is our friend. When we play spells or abilities (except mana abilities), that spell or ability goes on top on an invisible pile called the stack. In order to get to the bottom of the pile, we have to take things off the pile one at a time. The key though is that you can throw new stuff on the pile before you're done emptying out the stack. Usually the stack is very simple, but it can get complicated (thanks often to the twisted folks who love playing blue). The key to tossing things onto the pile is priority.

When most steps or phases start, the active player (whose turn it is) gets priority - the untap and cleanup steps are exceptions. After a player plays a spell or ability, that player (not always the active player) gets priority again. When a spell or ability resolves, the active player gets priority. The important thing to remember is that in order for something to resolve and be taken off the stack, both players must pass priority in succession. At that point, the top item on the stack (and only the top item) resolves. If you do nothing after playing a spell and your opponent plays a spell in response, you'll get a chance to respond to that spell before resolving anything.

As noted, playing a land doesn't use the stack. Here are a few more common things that don't use the stack (see [CR408.2] for the official list):

- Untapping, drawing your normal card for the draw step, and specifying attackers or blockers
- Mana abilities (tapping lands, sacrificing a Black Lotus, etc.)
- Following the instructions of an effect once it begins resolving
- Static abilities generating continuous effects
- State-based effects

The stack is most often used when we play spells and activated abilities. Doing so follows this plan in order (parts are skipped if not applicable):

- Announce the spell or ability (state what you're playing) and put it on the stack
- Choose the mode, alternate costs, value of X, kicker, buyback, splice, and so forth
- Choose targets
- Choose how the targets are affected (if the effect is different like with Drooling Grootdion) / divide or distribute the effect (Hail of Arrows)
- Figure out the cost, play mana abilities, and then pay costs
- The spell or ability is now considered "played"

Once you begin playing something, no one else can do anything until that thing is officially played. There is no time for a player to try and eliminate a Sakura-Tribe Elder, for example, between the time that you say you're going to activate its ability and the point at which it is sacrificed. Doing something to the permanents in play won't undo a spell or ability that's on the stack. You can't pay two costs with one thing.

Since the total cost is calculated before you pay costs, sacrificing something that increases or reduces a cost won't change what you pay. Sacrificing something that triggers on a spell or ability to pay the cost for that spell or ability means it won't be around to trigger (a Rusalka sacrificing a Burning-Tree Shaman, for example).

Total cost is what you pay to play something. The mana cost is only what's printed in the upper-right corner of the card. The converted mana cost is what's in that corner turned into a single number--colored mana symbols add one per symbol. Mana cost and converted mana cost don't change (unless there's an X in the cost, and the spell or ability is on the stack), but the total cost can. The cost calculation is handled in this exact order: Total cost = Mana cost + Additional costs - Cost reductions.

When a targeted spell or ability tries to resolve, it checks to see if the targets are still legal. If some are legal, only the legal ones are affected (and any other parts happen as normal). If all the targets are illegal, then the entire spell or ability is countered.



Spells and activated abilities are played by players. Triggered abilities trigger and are put onto the stack by players. Putting a triggered ability on the stack is much like playing a spell or ability. However, if a triggered ability doesn't have a legal target when it would go on the stack, it's ignored.

While spells are played sequentially, several triggered abilities may trigger simultaneously. However, they must be stacked into a sequential order. That order is handled with a few ideas. First, anything that triggered since the last time a player received priority is waiting to be put on the stack. If something triggers during your untap and something else triggers at the beginning of your upkeep, they'll both be ready for stacking when you receive priority. You can stack all your waiting triggers in any order. However, if multiple players have triggers, each player stacks only his or her triggers starting with the active player (whose turn it is), and then the non-active player--this is often called APNAP. If you and I each have a trigger at the same time, and it's my turn, I have to stack my trigger before you can stack yours, afterwards you'll stack your trigger, and then I'll have priority to play things.

Replacement effects seem like triggered abilities, but they're very different. For example, they don't use the stack. Instead, they wait for something that should occur, and they replace that event with some new event. Replacement effects often use the word "instead" in their wording, but there are some other exceptions. [CR 419] Prevention effects are like replacement effects that replace a damage event with a non-event.

If an event is replaced (or damage prevented), it never happens in any way. Things that would look for that event never see it at all - they only see the replace event.

If multiple replacement effects are trying to replace one event, the controller of the affected permanent or the player affect picks what order to apply the replacements. Then the next replacement applies if it's still applicable. Replacement effects can be cumulative. Two Furnaces of Rath will cause a Shock to deal  $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$  damage. If you add Urza's Armor to that mix, a player being Shocked could apply the Armor before either Furnace ( $(2 - 1) \times 2 \times 2 = 4$ ), between the two Furnaces ( $((2 \times 2 - 1) \times 2 = 6$ ), or at the end ( $2 \times 2 \times 2 - 1 = 7$ ).



Unlike triggered abilities, state-based effects don't use the stack, and no player controls SBEs. SBEs are checked at two times: when a player would get priority and as the last action of the cleanup step. That priority check covers quite a few times in any given turn. The check to finish the cleanup step is because of what SBEs are - they're janitors.

State-based effects have the task of making sure that things which shouldn't be going on in a game stop and are dealt with. If a SBE check does some cleaning, they will rerun their check again until everything is clear. If this (or a trigger) happens during cleanup, the cleanup step repeats after giving players priority to handle potential triggers and whatnot. Once the cleanup processes without incident, then the turn is safely put away, and the next turn begins.

State-based effects look for dead creatures, dead players, misplaced things, and Legendary / World objects. Here's the current SBE hit list:

Dead creatures-

- Creatures with zero or less toughness are put into the graveyard
- Lethally damaged creatures are destroyed

Dead players-

- Zero or less life = you lose
- Tried to draw from an empty library = you lose
- Ten or more poison counters = you lose

Misplaced things-

- An Aura on an illegal or missing object is put into the graveyard
- An Equipment on an illegal or missing object becomes unattached
- A non-Aura, non-Equipment permanent attached to another permanent becomes unattached
- A token in any zone except in-play ceases to exist
- A copy of a spell in any zone except the stack ceases to exist

Legendary / World-

- Two legendary permanents with the same name--both are put into the graveyard
- Two or more permanents with the world supertype - the newest one stays, the rest are out into the graveyard (ties go to the graveyard)

The legend rule and zero-or-less toughness will get rid of even indestructible and regenerating objects.

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There you have **Magic** in a tiny nutshell. There are tons more things to learn in there, but understanding the above will give you plenty of traction in understanding the rules. I've found that better understanding comes from a network of resources, and I'd like to take a quick moment to thank Laurie Cheers and Lee Sharpe for their work on proofreading Saturday School. For more resources in your own rules network, check the [Saturday School archives](#), the Rules Q &A board, and - of course - your local [DCI certified judge](#).

Class Dismissed.

--Carter

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*Carter has been playing **Magic** since 1994 and has been a certified judge since 1997. He has judged at every size and type of event, and he's always interested in new ideas to make events and **Magic** better for the gaming community. Carter enjoys helping players understand the rules, even if his analogies aren't as funny as he thinks they are.*

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