Weapon Breakdown

Weapons are an important component for cultures, religion, and warriors. Its even said, that those who live by the sword, will die by it. Weapons are an important element, and once you understand the basics of weapons and how they are created, mechanically speaking in a role playing game and not actually building a weapon with a forge, you can create weapons to reflect the people of your world.

The Basics

In *Dungeons & Dragons - 5th edition*, there are two main categories for weapons, Simple and Martial weapons. Within those two categories are ranged and melee weapons, and within them the categories continue to break down into smaller groups.

Each category starts at a basic damage die, which is then adjusted in size depending on what bonus and penalties are applied to the weapon. The qualities, which can be Positive Properties or Negative Properties, adjust how much damage a weapon does and what special properties it has.

Cost

Cost is rarely involved when it comes to determining the quality of a weapon, and so unless something is several hundred gold pieces, increasing a weapon's power due to its cost won't come into play.

Damage

Simple Melee weapons start at a d6 damage die, which is then adjusted by properties.
Martial Melee weapons start at a d8 damage die, which is then adjusted by properties.
Ranged weapons start at a d4 damage die, which is then adjusted by properties.

Weight

The weight of a weapon can help determine if a weapon is considered heavy or not, which limits the weapon to Medium sized creatures and larger. Small and smaller creatures can not effectively wield heavy weapons, and so have disadvantage on attack rolls while using them.

Properties

These are the unique abilities of a weapon and how it functions. These properties can come as Positive Properties or Negative Properties, each increasing or decreasing the damage die respectively.

Positive Properties

These properties decrease the damage die and include:

- **Light** These weapons allow you to wield them in both hands and gain an extra attack.
- **Reach** You can hit creatures from further away, which is helpful when you hide behind the front line.

Negative Properties

These properties increase the damage die and include:

- **Heavy** These weapons make it difficult to wield properly, and all official weapons, that are heavy, also have the Two-Handed negative property.
- **Loading** This limits your firing potential with a ranged weapon to once per turn.
- **Two-Handed** These weapons are often quite large, requiring you to use two hands.

Other Properties

Some properties are not considered positive or negative, and so do not affect a weapon's damage die.

- **Ammunition** A ranged weapon either has this property or the Thrown property.
- **Finesse** This property allows the wielder use their Dexterity instead of Strength, and officially, it is only applied to slashing or piercing weapons, is not applied to Heavy or Two-Handed weapons, and no Finesse weapon goes above a d8.
- **Range** If a weapon has the Thrown property or is a ranged weapon, it needs a range. The first increment is its normal range, its second increment, which is three times the first increment, is its maximum range.
- **Special** This property can be a variety of different things. Since it only appears on two different official weapons, it has the possibility of increasing or decreasing the damage of a weapon.
- **Thrown** Being able to use a melee weapon as a ranged weapon is quite handy when fighting birds.
- **Versatile** If you are willing to grasp it with two hands, you get a larger damage die.

Damage Die

A weapon's damage die is adjusted in size from small to large based on the number of properties a weapon has. Positive properties decrease the size of a weapon's damage die by one increment, negative properties increase the size of a weapon's damage die by one increment.

A decrease in size means that a d12 turns to a d10, d10 to a d8, then a d6, and finally a d4.

An increase in size means that a d4 turns to a d6, d6 to a d8, then a d10, and finally a d12.

Split Damage Dice

For a change, you can split a damage die in half so that a d12 is now 2d6 or a d8 is 2d4. This doesn't effect the power of a weapon, but you shouldn't increase a weapon's damage dice in this manner above 2d6.

You could decide that something has too many negative properties, and in that case, it might make sense or else the weapon would never be used, but beware it increases the damage output to unbalanced levels.

Broken Weapons

Some weapons have been purposefully designed to ignore this system, like the Yklwa, Net, Blowgun, Whip, and others. Sometimes it might make sense to break the mold, but it shouldn't be for every item.

Simple Melee Weapons

Weapon Name	Damage		Weight	Properties
Brass Knuckles	1d4 bludgeoning		1 lb	Light, Open Handed
Hook Hand	1d4 piercing		1 lb	Attachment, Finesse, Light

Martial Melee Weapons

Weapon Name	Damage	Weight	Properties
Cutlass	1d10 slashing	5 lbs	Unwieldy, Versatile (1d12)
Hûthvír	1d10 slashing	5 lbs	Double Bladed, Finesse, Two-Handed, Unwieldy
Khopesh	1d6 slashing	3 lbs	Trip
Macuahuitl	2d4 slashing	5 lbs	Critical (2d6), Heavy
Xaen	1d12 slashing or piercing (your choice)	10 lbs	Heavy, Reach, Unwieldy, Two-Handed

Examples

Looking at a few different weapons, we can easily break down how they are built:

Longsword. Since it is a martial melee weapon, it begins at a d8. It has the Versatile property, so you can add the Two-Handed property and increase the damage die to a d10 but you must wield it with two hands.

Dagger. Since it is a simple melee weapon, it begins at a d6. It has the Light positive property, which decreases its damage to a d4. Finesse and Thrown does not effect it.

Handaxe and **Light Hammer**. Both of these are simple melee weapons, and so they begin at a d6. They each have the properties Light and Thrown. Since Light is a positive property, it should decrease their damage to a d4, but only the Light Hammer shows the decrease. The Handaxe remains a d6. This isn't the only time where the rules are broken with little information as to why. This makes light hammers useless and is something that should be avoided in creating weapons.

Morningstar. Since it is a martial melee weapon, it begins at a d8. It has no other properties.

Crossbow, Heavy. Since it is a ranged weapon, it begins at a d4. It has three negative properties: Heavy, Loading, and Two-Handed; which increases its damage to a d10.

Custom Weapons

Now that the basics of weapon building have been solved, we can now look at creating new weapons. Here are a few I have created for my own games that can be used as inspiration for yours, as well as new properties that can be used in weapons. These weapons should be treated as exotic or strange, not freely available as anytime homebrew is introduced, it always comes with the risk that new abilities might be produced in the future that create strange effects, or that it has odd effects when combined with other effects.

New Weapon Properties

Attachment (Other). This weapon must be attached to a limb, often when a hand has been amputated. A creature can not be disarmed of this weapon without first breaking the weapon.

Critical (Positive). On the result of a 20 on the d20 for an attack roll, the damage die increases by two sizes (d4 to a d8) to a maximum of a d12. If a weapon has split damage dice, like a greatsword, the damage dice increases by one size (d4 to a d6), to a maximum of a d6.

Double Bladed (Positive). When you take the Attack action with this weapon, you can use a bonus action to strike out with the secondary blade as if you were two weapon fighting. On a hit, you deal 1d4 slashing damage.

Open Handed (Other). You can hold an item while wielding this weapon. You can not wield a different weapon while a hand is wielding this weapon.

Shove (Positive). When making an attack with a weapon with this trait, you can choose to push back a creature, that is up to one size category larger than you, up to 5 feet from you instead of dealing damage. The creature must make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to 8 + your Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Trip (Positive). When making an attack with a weapon with this trait, you can choose to knock a creature, that is up to one size category larger than you, prone on a successful hit instead of dealing damage. The creature must make a Strength saving throw with a DC equal to 8 + your Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Unwieldy (Negative). Creatures with a Strength of 15 or less have disadvantage on attack rolls with unwieldy weapons unless they wield it with two hands. An unwieldy weapon's shape and form make it to strange for a weaker creature to effectively wield with a single hand.

New Weapons

Cutlass. This broad sabre has a slightly curved blade and is useful for cutting through thick rope.

Hook Hand. This hook is attached to an arm and allows a creature to have some ability to manipulate items.

Hûthvír. This staff appears like a quarterstaff with leaf-shaped blades on either end.

Khopesh. This sword is sickle-shaped and has a dull edge on the inside, useful for tripping creatures.

Macuahuitl. This large weapon is formed like a wooden club with several embedded obsidian blades.

Xaen. This heavy battle staff is covered in bone spikes and hooks, and is a weapon wielded by the gautiere on Carceri.