

VARIANT: IMPROVED TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING

THE PROBLEM

D&D 5E's base rules for two-weapon fighting have several problems:

- The power curve is very uneven. Two-weapon fighting tends to be very strong in tier 1, decent in tier 2, and falls off hard in tier 3 and 4.
- It requires your bonus action, and competes for it with many builds. This is particularly egregious for rogues, monks, and some (but not all) ranger subclasses, but causes problems for almost any archetype at some point.
- It doesn't play well with the big melee combat feats - Great Weapon Master and Polearm Master. Most martial builds wind up relying heavily on one of these to keep up damage-wise in tier 3 and tier 4.
- Due to the extra drawing and stowing of weapons that's involved, it's often very taxing on a character's free object interactions. Playing strictly about object interaction rules often makes two-weapon fighting impractical.

These rules aim to address these problems. The goal is to be simple, fun, and fit cleanly into the existing game.

TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING

This replaces the Two-Weapon Fighting section in the PHB.

Once per turn when you take the Attack action and attack with a light melee weapon that you're holding in one hand, you may make one additional attack with a different light melee weapon that you're holding in the other hand. You don't add your ability modifier to the damage of the off-hand attack, unless that modifier is negative. If either weapon has the thrown property, you may throw it instead of making a melee attack.

FIGHTING STYLE - TWO-WEAPON MASTERY

This replaces the Two-Weapon Fighting style in the Fighter and Ranger classes.

When you are wielding two melee weapons, you gain the following benefits:

- When you take the Attack action and engage in two-weapon fighting, you may choose either weapon for every attack, as long as you make at least one attack with each weapon.
- You can engage in two-weapon fighting with weapons that are not light.
- You gain a +1 bonus to your AC if both weapons are light, or if one weapon is a d4 or smaller die size.
- You have an extra free object interaction each turn which may only be used for drawing or stowing a weapon.

NOTE: FLURRY OF STABS

Class changes are beyond the scope of this document, but one to consider: only allow Monks to use their Flurry of Blows feature if they have an empty hand.

FEAT - TWIN STRIKE

This replaces the Dual Wielder feat.

You have mastered the art of distracting your opponent with two weapons before closing in for a deadly blow. You gain the following benefits:

- When you engage in two-weapon fighting, you can add your ability modifier to the damage of the extra attack.
- When you engage in two-weapon fighting, as long as the weapons' damage dice are d8 or smaller, you may choose to attack with both weapons simultaneously. Before rolling an attack, you may choose to take a -3 penalty to the attack roll. If the attack hits, you roll damage dice for both weapons, only adding your ability modifier once.
- When you are wielding two weapons and an opponent misses a melee attack against you, you may use your reaction to make one melee attack with one of your weapons.

NOTE: DOUBLING UP

It is intended that on-hit effects intrinsic to the weapon work with Twin Strike - if your DM lets you have two *flametongue* short swords, that's on them. But spells that apply on-hit effects (e.g. *holy weapon*, *hunter's mark*) only apply once per attack.



LET'S TALK ABOUT BALANCE

Obviously there are a lot of two-weapon fighting fixes out there. I won't go in detail into my math here, but I will offer some general conversation about the balance considerations that have gone into these rules.

THE GOAL

Two-weapon fighting is occasionally derided as historically inaccurate; it comes up frequently as a fantasy trope but was rare in historical cultures. There are a few examples (rapier and main-gauche, Miyamoto Musashi's katana and wakizashi style), but it's certainly more prominent in fantasy fiction than it ever was in history. It's a big enough part of fantasy, though, that D&D should have a good way to model it. The game's current compromise, if you dig into the math, looks an *awful* lot like WotC used very simple numbers on their end.

My objective in devising the rules above was to find a balance point halfway between weapon-and-shield fighting and great weapons. In general, great weapons ought to do the most damage; weapon-and-shield should be the most defensive. I wanted dedicated two-weapon fighting to land squarely in the middle, with the ability to make more attacks at lower damage than other characters.

If you look at the One D&D playtest rules, you will see that WotC themselves are now considering similar changes. The Expert Classes playtest document eliminates the bonus action for two-weapon fighting, though it does not (as of yet) have a way to keep up damage output at higher levels.

GIMME TABLES!

The table below assumes characters:

- Start with a 16 in their main stat and the most relevant fighting style from level 1 (Variant TWF assumes you stick with light weapons for the +1 to AC. Switching to 1d8 weapons would grant +2-6 DPR, depending).
- Go up to an 18 at level 4.
- Get Extra Attack at level 5.
- Go up to a 20 at level 8.
- Take a significant combat feat at level 12.

Obviously there are many scenarios where progression isn't as uniform, but broadly the math doesn't change *that* much for classes that get more ASIs or Variant Humans who start with a feat. I have done the math for many alternate builds; I'm not presenting it all here, for simplicity's sake. The numbers are average damage per round (DPR).

Key Levels	Sword & Shield	Spear (PAM) & Shield	Greatsword (GWM)	Vanilla TWF	Variant TWF
1st	9.5	8.5	11.3	13	10
4th	10.5	9.5	12.3	15	11
5th	21	19	24.6	22.5	19.5
8th	23	21	26.6	25.5	21.5
12th	23	30.5	46.6	28.5	36

You can do the same DPR calculations with to-hit bonuses built in; personally I think these numbers are a little deceptive, because they ignore the practical ways characters can mitigate the to-hit penalties of Great Weapon Master (or Twin Strike). But they can still be helpful. If you use the baseline assumption that 65% of attacks hit, and apply penalties for GWM and Twin Strike, here's the chart.

Key Levels	Sword & Shield	Spear (PAM) & Shield	Greatsword (GWM)	Vanilla TWF	Variant TWF
1st	6.2	5.5	8.8	8.4	6.5
4th	6.8	6.2	9.8	9.7	7.1
5th	13.6	12.3	16	14.6	12.6
8th	15	13.6	17.3	16.5	14
12th	15	19.8	18.6	18.5	18

THE MATH

I made a number of damage tables (many more than I'm showing here) for different builds to validate these changes. In general, I assumed characters would get their attack stat to 20 before taking any feats (so, starting with a +3 and then boosting stats with their first two ASIs). I did do a few charts that tested builds which delayed ASIs in favor of earlier feats - but ultimately there's only so much math you can do.

Broadly, Variant Two-Weapon Fighting as presented in this document is a little weaker in tier 1 (good!), somewhat weaker but still competitive in tier 2 (not ideal), and much stronger in tier 3 and 4 (good!). In general, damage is shifted away from the Fighting Style and into the Twin Strike feat.

Eliminating the bonus-action requirement is a large buff to rangers and rogues, and makes two-weapon fighting a viable option for monks. But it's not outrageous. In general, melee rangers using Variant Two-Weapon Fighting will be competitive with ranged builds. Two-weapon rogues will hit a bit harder than ranged, but don't get the AC boost of the fighting style, or any of the various advantages of ranged combat. Monks using Variant Two-Weapon Fighting punch above their weight, but still do less single-target damage than most fighters and are limited by their ki pool. If you require them to maintain a free hand in order to use Flurry of Blows, it'll help keep their damage much closer. Another good option is to limit Stunning Strike to unarmed strikes only.

CHANGE LOG

V0.31

- Styling and layout adjustments since I found the artwork in high resolution

V0.3

- Styling and layout adjustments, and added a note about WotC's Expert Classes playtest.

V0.2

- Limited Twin Strike's damage dice to d8's, which keeps damage output in line with homebrew that allows TWF with d10 or d12 weapons.

V0.1

- Initial Draft!

CREDITS & REFERENCES:

- Variant Two-Weapon Fighting created by somanyrobots

Art

- All art © Wizards of the Coast LLC
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Background Image Stains

- [/u/flamableconcrete,](https://watercolors.giantsoup.com/)
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