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# So you want to be a TO

That’s great! As a prospective Tournament Organizer (TO), you’re going to need some stuff, so let’s go over that first.

**You need these things:**

* Interest. If nobody wants to play in a structured environment then there’s no point in running structured events. This shouldn’t stop you from scheduling casual play time.
* A room, tables, and several hours in said room to run events.
* You’ve read the official tournament floor rules, right? OK then.
* Some amount of involvement in the community (Reddit, Discord, Facebook) so you hear about the various bits of errata and problems people have found.

**You really want these things to help you run the tournament:**

* Minions (“staff”)
  + People assigned to you through the con (“con staff”) who you can schedule shifts of work for
  + Other people (players you trust, sponsor employees, etc) who help out here and there
* Judges who understand the rules *correctly* and can fairly rule on the weird situations that come up in games. Pick the best of them to be the Head Judge (HJ). You (the TO) can also be a [head] judge if you’re comfortable with the rules.
* A chain of command so if the TO or the HJ isn’t available, someone else can step in and act in that role.
* A timer (not your phone) for keeping track of time in rounds.
* Tournament management software and a **reliable** computer to run it on.

**If you want prize support, you need a few more things:**

* A sponsor to provide product support (for limited events) and prize support.
  + A way to take payment for entries. Most of the time the sponsor takes care of this.
  + A secure way to store product.
* A way to track who has entered what event.

Once you’ve got those things, then it’s time to consider things that make your life easier while running the tournament. The more of these you have, the easier life is.

If your tournament software supports match slips, this is highly recommended.

**Support for running the tournament on a computer:**

* A printer to print decklists, and other documents as well as match slips and pairings so you can post them somewhere.
* Office paper. Pastel colored office paper for preference, so you can use a different color for each round.
* A paper cutter to slice match slips up.
* A lot of red pens for players to fill match slips and decklists out. Nobody steals red pens.
* Blue painter’s tape to post standings or pairings. Hotels usually don’t let you use anything else to attach stuff to the wall.

**Other miscellaneous things:**

* If doing limited events: rubber bands to hold product kits together.
* A room dedicated to your events. Things get much easier if you don’t have to tear everything down at night and put it back up next morning.
* Marketing/PR for your events. More exposure = better attendance.
* A PA system. If you have to yell over people constantly, you’ll lose your voice.

**Streaming stuff:**

If you intend to stream your events, or have somebody (CiM, for example) stream them, there are a few more things to check on.

* Permission to record and stream events from the convention/venue.
* A good uplink to the internet, either good cellular network signal (CiM uses T-Mobile) or a dedicated connection from the venue (normally hideously expensive). You need at least 1.5Mbps up to get decent quality.
* Hardware to actually do the streaming, which is beyond the scope of this document, or someone (hi!) who will run the stream.
* A 6’ table to dedicate to streaming equipment

# Venue/event space

Figuring out what you can run given the space and time you’ve got is the first step. Most of the time you’ll get a room or a block of time in a room and it’s up to you to figure out how to make the most of it. Before we get to that, let’s talk about tables.

## Tables

The tables normally seen at events are 2.5’ by 6’ (0.75m x 1.8m). These can support 4 players. Sometimes you’ll get 8’ (2.4m) tables, which can support 6 players. Don’t try to jam more people onto a table than this if you have another option.

A player needs a minimum of 13.5” by 24” of space on a table - this is the size of a standard playmat, but this is very cramped for most people. Ideally a player should have at least 15” by 30” (0.37m x 0.75m) of space on the table, which provides room for deck boxes and such to be kept off the playmat.

**Tablecloths**

There’s going to be a bunch of tables which we’ll call the staff area. These are tables that are being used for TO stuff, by registration or by the sponsor to sell stuff. They should have tablecloths on them. The area under them is valuable storage space, and keeping that stuff hidden is important.

### Chair space and aisles

It turns out tables are actually about 3.5’ (1m) wider than stated, because you need chairs on either side, a little bit of space to scoot the chair out to get up, and space to walk down the aisles between tables.

## Layout for your own room

The size and shape of the room determines how many tables can be jammed into it, which determines how many players the room can support. The room needs to support a number of things beyond just places to play, but focusing on accessibility to the play tables will tend to produce good layouts.

### Room functions/zones

**Registration**

A place for people to get empty deck lists, ask questions and sign up for events. Needs to be easily accessible from the door. This needs at least a 3’ (0.9m) length of table.

**Tournament ops**

The place where the TO runs the tournament from, and where players report results. Needs to be easily accessible from the play area. The amount of space this needs depends on what equipment is being used, but consider a 3’ length of table to start with.

**Play area**

The area where players sit down to play games. Needs to be easy to get into and out of. When you do layout for this, don’t put tables closer together than 4’ (1.2m) or you don’t have aisles.

The play area is normally divided into a number of tables, which each have two seats. Table tents can be made from a single piece of paper which nicely labels both tables and all four seats at a single 2.5’x6’ table: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1G-BqWIZtVhW_BRF-_5tAT9v2PmpEaW8l>

**Sponsor store/vendor outpost**

If possible, try to provision some space for the sponsor to sell things such as packs and sleeves. This should probably be close to registration since both may need to handle money. May need power to run a cash register/recharge a tablet/etc.

**Storage dump**

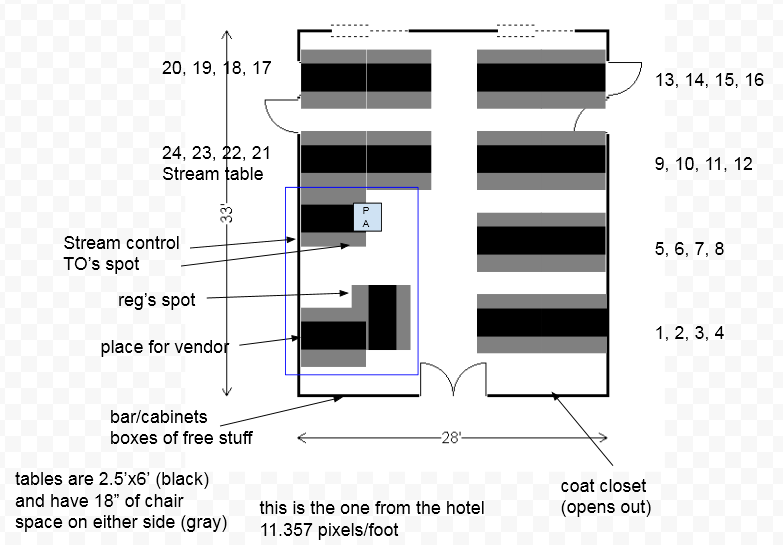
Like it or not, staff and players will bring more stuff than they can cart around with them. Plan on having bags, suitcases and boxes full of stuff for the tournament pile up somewhere.

**Stream table**

The equipment Commentary is Magic usually uses to do streaming takes up at least a full 2.5’x6’ table worth of space, but only gives you two seats. This usually demands a dedicated table somewhere. It obviously needs access to power.

## Example

### Everfree Northwest 2016



This has wide aisles between tables, lots of storage in the cabinets and coat closet, and good access to all parts of the room. The numbers aside the drawing are table labels.This layout worked out pretty well.

## tl;dr

Figure out how many tables you can jam into a room while keeping 4’ between tables, subtract about 4 tables from that, then add about 3 back for the staff area. 4 players to a 6’ table gives your your cap on players.

NOTE: Just because you have 64 seats doesn’t mean you’ll get 64 players for every event. How many you’ll actually get is very hard to estimate, and your best bet is to look at historical numbers. Many events have had wild swings in attendance from year to year for reasons that may only be obvious after the fact.

# Events

## Constructed

Constructed events have players bringing their own decks to the event. There are various formats that allow or ban different sets of cards, and it’s expected that players will fill out a decklist for the event; Ponyhead lets players generate these themselves, but you’ll need a bunch of blank ones for people who didn’t bring their own: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ONV_2rheHyIVgiagUfFFqZcy6Lb1533x>

The two important constructed formats are Harmony and Core. These are well defined in the official floor rules, but the short summary is Harmony is all cards, minus the banned cards. Core is Harmony with the additional restriction that only cards from the last two blocks may be used and it has its own ban list..

There are other, mostly unplayed constructed formats such as Premiere Block (PR, CN, CG and AD cards only), EO Block (EO, HM, MT), Defenders Block (DE, SB, FF), Nightmare (Harmony but no ban list), Pauper (common and uncommon cards only) variants and Sisterhooves (2v2, many other restrictions)

Big constructed events may also include a cut to elimination rounds (“top 8”). The elimination rounds should be a separate event, since only a few players will get to participate. If possible, the elimination rounds should be scheduled on the same day with a long break between it and the swiss rounds.

## Limited

Limited events have players building decks out of product they get during the event. There’s support for these formats officially in new limited documents and floor rules, though some things are still imported from Magic or otherwise adapted by the community.

These events generally demand more player skill to build a workable deck, and draft in particular is not recommended for inexperienced players - it’s very easy for a player to put themselves at a severe disadvantage before the first game starts.

Limited decks are 30 cards minimum, 5 card problem decks. There is no ban list, and it’s legal to run any number of copies of a card provided players pull them. The TO normally allows of certain cards (e.g. the common/uncommon manes, the Kevin that comes with draft packs and wild/wild problems with no abilities) to be added from outside a player’s limited pool.

You may decide to allow additional cards such as the wild/wild problems with abilities, a different/larger set of manes (consider keeping the CMC banned - Scoots wrecks things), or allow players to include a small number of entry friends from outside of their limited pool. For all cards you’ll allow to be added from outside limited pools, you should have proxies available for players; print these out and cut them up ahead of time.

[links to proxy documents]

**Draft** is a format where players start with four packs and open them from newest to oldest. When a player opens a pack, they choose a card, then pass the remaining cards to an adjacent player, and continue until they run out of cards to pass. Then another pack is opened and the cards are passed the other way. Their deck is built out of the cards they picked, and proxies provided by the TO.

When the event is actually run, players need to be divided into pods of 5-9 players to pick cards. It’s a good idea to ask if anybody knows how to draft and try to make sure there’s at least one of those people in each pod - they’ll be able to help run picks in each pod. Counting cards when they come out of the pack, and once everybody is done picking from a pack is helpful to identify errors, and it’s usually worth running the first pack in lockstep to help players get familiar with the process.

**Sealed** is a format where players are given some quantity of product and play with that. Most of the time a player will start with six or eight packs, and build a deck out of the cards contained within their packs, plus the proxies provided by the TO. Occasionally you’ll also see players start with a theme deck and some number of packs.

**Team Sealed** is sealed with multiple players getting more packs but needing to build multiple decks. The common setup is teams of three getting 16 packs. Each player in a team is assigned A, B or C and plays their corresponding player on another team; the games don’t interact, but the players can help each other.

**Novice games** is the name commonly given to a format where new players are given a theme deck and staff assistance while playing. This is often the next step forward for a lot of players after doing learn to play. Limit the number of rounds to 2-3 and use a flat prize structure.

## Chaos

Traditionally a sealed event of some form, this is where the game’s rules bend to the judges’ ever-changing whim, cards from other games show up, plushies get put into play, sharpies are used to errata cards to do insane and broken things, and everybody generally has a good time watching everything go to hell in a handbasket.

Running this well is an art form, and it’s best done by and with people who can creatively misconstrue rules and card text for maximum hilarity. The best way to learn to run chaos well is to attend one that’s run well in the first place.

## Learn to play

Blocks of time where you have a bunch of staff ready to teach people how to play the game. People will also show up when you’re not currently running learn to play and want to learn.

You need to bring something people can use for AT as well as demo decks. The pony primer provided by Enter-Play will work, or you can make a ~15 card demo deck out of random commons that will suffice to teach core game concepts. Official events have switched to using the EO theme decks for learn to play. Consider cheating entry for both colors into the players’ opening hands.

## “Organized” casual play

Scheduled periods where you’re basically inviting people to show up and meet other people who want to play casual games. These are nice because they give you a break from actually running stuff, and they tend to pair well with learn to play.

# Scheduling

Once again, we’re going to lay some groundwork first, with a discussion about how a single event runs before worrying about running multiple events.

## Estimating for a single event

During a given event, you’re going to need about 15 minutes of time at the start due to players showing up late, explaining stuff to players and other assorted housekeeping. Plan on this happening, or you’ll fall behind almost immediately. Limited events take more time on top of this at the beginning, as previously mentioned.

### Round timing

To players, Swiss rounds are 35 minutes. This is a lie as far as the TO is concerned - from an event perspective, a 35 minute round tends to actually take about 45 minutes. The extra 10 minutes are spent doing end of round turns, getting match results and seating for the next round.

Plan for the worst case, and assume rounds will take the full 45 minutes. If the meta is aggro heavy, it’s possible rounds will end faster than anticipated and you can finish the event early.

### Events themselves

The tournament rules have suggestions for how many rounds should be run for a given number of players. These are intended to determine a single winner from the entire field of players:

Suggested number of Swiss rounds:

• 4 players – 3 rounds

• 5 to 8 players – 4 rounds

• 9 to 16 players – 5 rounds

• 17 to 24 players – 6 rounds

• 25 to 39 players – 7 rounds

• 40 to 56 players – 8 rounds

• 57 to 98 players – 9 rounds

• 99 or more players – 10 rounds

*Version 2.5 of the tournament rules, page 6*

At a pony con, playing CCG is not the only thing people are there to do, so it’s generally a good idea to make things go a little faster. It’s commonplace to reduce the number of rounds by 2 or 3 (if limited by seats) or assume you can handle another round or two worth of players (if limited by time). Cuts for elimination rounds can help out since you only need to establish a top however many, which in theory allows you to reduce the number of rounds.

Combining the round count suggestions with round timing yields an estimate of how long an event with a given number of players will take. Depending on whether events are limited by seating or time, it’s possible to estimate the required amount of the other quantity.

### tl;dr

Events take 15 minutes, plus 45 minutes per round. Determine how many rounds/people you can support given the seating or time constraints, then consider running fewer rounds if limited by seating, or accepting more players if limited by time. Don’t go more than a notch, maybe two, in either direction, but also don’t run events with more than about 5 rounds or people will get tired.

## Cooperating with other people using the room

In cases where you only have a few hours of time in a room shared by something else (e.g. generic tabletop), you probably only have time for one or two events. Short constructed or sealed events are probably your best bet here.

Ideally you’ll be able to get some equipment setup done ahead of time without disturbing whatever else is going on in the room, so your event will be able to start on time. Give yourself at least 15 minutes of buffer time on either side of your event to let people clear out.

## Building a schedule for your own room

If you have more time in a shared room, or own your own room, then you get to come up with a bigger list of events. You’re probably also at a pony con, which adds a few more wrinkles.

There are two key things to remember:

1. It takes time to switch between events
2. People need breaks
3. Events, like this list, will run long

The thing to take away here is that you really should leave at least half an hour between events, don’t run events late into the night, and don’t start them at the crack of dawn; at least give yourself a chance to get 8 hours of sleep.

You should, if possible, consider other events at the con. It’s impossible to avoid them all, but be mindful of the big ones, such as the charity auction, concert(s) or VA panels - you *will* lose these fights, but sometimes it’s unavoidable.

The hour after opening ceremonies and the hour before closing ceremonies are functionally useless, and you shouldn’t schedule anything other than casual play or learn to play during that time because all the attendees are exploring or at linecon.

### Staff schedules

When you have minions, you’ll need to build a schedule for them too. Remember they need to eat, sleep and probably want to see the rest of the con; don’t schedule people for more than about 4 hours in a row, and ask for - then try to accommodate - their requests to play in events or to go to panels.

It’s a good idea to keep at least two people scheduled to be on shift at all times so there’s always somebody in the room to handle registration. Try to have another person around during events to help out with judging and such.

# Product and prize support

Product support refers to stuff needed to play in the event, such as packs for draft or sealed. Prize support refers to stuff given out as a result of placement in the event. Draft, for example, would need 4 packs of product support, plus some number of packs of prize support per player.

There’s also the possibility of support beyond standard product, such as bulk promotional cards, organized play promo kits, angel/god packs and other assorted swag.

## Sponsors

There are a variety of parties that might be able to help you out with product. Here we’ll cover some options for getting packs and such to run events with.

1. ~~Ask Enter-play themselves, at~~ [~~op@enter-play.com~~](mailto:op@enter-play.com)~~. This works best if you know the various people who work with Enter-play, or one of their partners is a vendor at the con already.~~
2. Us (Commentary Is Magic), at [commentaryismagicteam@gmail.com](mailto:commentaryismagicteam@gmail.com).
3. A local game store. You should check with the con (ask the person who runs the vendor hall) to make sure the store can conduct business in the venue.
4. Yourself. This requires a non-trivial amount of capital to buy the product up front, and has various tax implications since you’re conducting sales and effectively operating a small business. Not recommended unless you know what you’re doing, so do your research about (temporary) business licenses in the city/state your event is in and your tax reporting obligations thereto.

## Costs

The cost of a pack to the average player is somewhere between $1.99 (splitting a case from Potomac) to about $5 (buying a single pack from Toys R Us; RIP). Stores tend to sell packs for somewhere around $3. The cost of entry vs support is a conversation you’ll have to have with your sponsor.

Players tend to bring cash. Try to make entry fees a multiple of $5 if possible; make sure you’ve got enough seed money (read: $5 bills) to handle people paying for a $15 event with a $20. Also get a Square or something equivalent for those who want to pay with a card and make sure it works ahead of time (charge yourself $1).

As examples:

* Constructed: $5 - 2 packs of prize support
* Draft: $15 - 4 packs of product support plus 2 packs of prize support

## Prize structures

With the prize support you’re getting for each event, you need to decide how you’ll distribute it. A prize structures can be described as “flat”, meaning there’s not a lot of benefit to placing well, or “top heavy” meaning a player may not get anything unless they place well.

Flat prize structures are appropriate for beginners’ tournaments and casual events where the point is to play, not to win, which dissuades hardcore competitive players from doing tryhard things (the sooner you accept that they’ll still do tryhard things anyway the happier you’ll be). As an example, start at the top of the standings and give each player one pack, restarting at the top once you reach the bottom, and continue this until you run out of packs.

Top heavy prize structures are appropriate for serious competitive play, where the point is to win, which dissuades casual players. As an example, give half of the packs to 1st place, 1/3rd to 2nd place, and the remaining packs to 3rd place.

I tend to favor a middle ground for constructed events, where everybody gets at least one pack, but players with better records get additional packs.

To do this, I give each player a pack. Then, I divide what’s left in half, and give one half to the top however many players. The other half I divide in half again, and give one half to the top however many players. Repeat until you run out of packs.

For an event with 12 players, where I have 24 packs to distribute, the structure looks like this:

| Place | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Packs | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

For limited events, I tend to favor a pack per win, which requires (players/2) packs per round for prizes. This works out nicely with a four round tournament.

Feel free to develop your own scheme for distributing packs, or use one of the above schemes as a base and adjust it to your liking. You may also end up with other stuff for prizes, such as promos, organized play kits, sleeves, deck boxes, etc. You should add these to the schedule as you feel appropriate, but if you end up with leftover stuff or things that don’t fit into a prize structure well (sleeves, deck boxes, etc), there’s always raffling it off.

## Estimating what you need

Before you talk with your sponsor, you should have an idea of what you’ll need to run your events. The correct answer here is to build a spreadsheet to keep track of which event, how many players, and what that event will need. Find an egghead who can drive Excel to help you, if necessary.

Try to get at least two packs per player of prize support for all events. If you can get assorted swag (dog tags, pins, etc), it’s worth picking up a few pieces per event to raffle off, too.

Draft needs 4 packs for product support, the exact distribution is up to you, but two of the latest set and two of the next oldest set is a good starting point.

Sealed generally needs 8 packs for product support, and again, the exact distribution is up to you, but four of the latest set and two each of the next two oldest sets is a good starting point.

Chaos events might use more product during the course of the event e.g. giving everyone a pack during the middle of the event and having players do something with those cards

# Policy document

One of the things that has come in handy in the past is a document specific to your events that lays out further guidelines and policies above and beyond what’s specified in the official floor rules, and should also explicitly restate portions of the official floor rules (the average player didn’t read those) relating to score and time rules. Note they won’t read these either, but it gives you something to point to.

The Everfree Northwest 2016 CCG events announcement has a good example of this, under the “Structure Details” heading. See the announcement here: <https://www.reddit.com/r/MLPCCG/comments/4fduia/mlpccg_events_at_everfree_northwest_2016/>

# Tournament software

**EquineEventReporter** - <https://github.com/Bigcheese/EquineEventReporter>

This is not for the faint of heart, because it’s written by nerds for nerds, but it does directly support the official rules for events and do all the things it needs to do. I use this exclusively, though to be fair I did help write portions of it.

**Challonge** - <http://challonge.com/>

People use this, it seems to work as long as byes don’t get involved.

**WER** - <http://wpn.wizards.com/en/wer>

WER is the official tournament software for Magic. If you put it in offline mode and fiddle with it enough, it’s usable for running pony events as well. Just don’t run it in online mode and do not ask for DCI numbers.

# Actually running the events

It’s finally the day of events, after all that planning (make your own Twilight joke, she’s already mad at me for the egghead thing above), which has hopefully kept things smooth up to this point.

* Remember to start your timers at the beginning of the round and write down the round start time somewhere just in case your timer breaks.
* It’s nice to call a 5 minute warning.
* When you call time in round, you’ll need to explain end of round procedures because nobody seems to remember them.
* When you call time or time warnings, you need to do it loud and multiple times since people tend to not hear them.
* Inspect decklists as you can for correctness, because players like to write things like “Luna” without including the subtitle to uniquely identify the card. Some cards actually have no subtitle, and unfortunately most of those cards also have other cards that share the title e.g. Nightmare Moon. Worse yet, multiple Nightmare Moon cards are plausible for a villain farming deck, so there’s no telling which one it is.
* When you don’t have anything better to do, wander around and watch people playing
* Lay prize support out before you need it
* Build product support kits before you need them