

The Stack & Layers Cheat Sheet

CR 08.2026

Magic has two ordering systems. The stack orders things that happen one at a time. Layers order things that are all true at once.

THE LOOP – CR 117

Someone acts → Everyone passes → The top resolves → Active player first ♻️ AND AGAIN

↳ All pass on an empty stack? Nothing resolves – the step or phase just ends. 405.5

Priority CR 117

Who may act right now.

Instant any time you have priority.

Sorceries only in your own main phase, with an empty stack. 117.1a

Activated abilities any time you have priority. 117.1b

Mana abilities need no priority – you may activate them mid-cast. 117.1d

Act, and you get priority again. Nobody skips ahead of you. 117.3c

Pass, and the next player in turn order gets it. 117.3d

After anything resolves, the active player goes first. 117.3b

No priority in untap. Usually none in cleanup. 117.3a

Casting in response to something means yours resolves first. 117.7

Casting a spell CR 601.2

One uninterrupted sequence – nobody can respond until step i is done.

^a Move the card to the stack. 601.2a

^b Announce modes, kicker, and any alternative or additional costs. 601.2b

^c Choose targets. 601.2c

^d Divide anything the spell divides. 601.2d

^e The game checks the spell is legal. If it is not, everything rewinds to before you started. 601.2e

^f Work out the total cost. 601.2f

^g Tap for mana. This is the only window for it. 601.2g

^h Pay. No partial payments, ever. 601.2h

ⁱ The spell is cast. Cast triggers go on the stack. You keep priority. 601.2i

Resolving CR 608.2

Last on, first off – one object at a time.

Each new object goes on top of everything already there. 405.2

A trigger with an “if” clause checks it now, and does nothing if it is false. 608.2a

Targets are checked again. If every one is illegal, the spell fizzles – removed from the stack, not resolved. It is not countered. 608.2b

If some targets are still legal, it resolves and the illegal ones are skipped. 608.2b

Instructions happen in the order written. 608.2c

Nobody has priority while something is resolving. 117.2e

An instant or sorcery hits the graveyard as its last step. 608.2n

Never uses the stack CR 405.6

You cannot respond to any of these.

Mana abilities. They resolve immediately. 405.6c

Static abilities. Always on, never announced. 405.6b

Special actions – playing a land, turning a face-down creature up. 405.6d

Turn-based actions – untapping, the draw-step draw. 405.6e

State-based actions – set out in full under 704. 405.6f

Effects. Only the spell or ability that made them used the stack. 405.6a

State-based actions CR 704

Checked every time a player would get priority, all at once, then again until nothing happens.

They ignore anything that happens mid-resolution. 704.4

0 or less life – that player loses. 704.5a

Drew from an empty library – that player loses. 704.5b

Ten or more poison counters – that player loses. 704.5c

0 or less toughness – into the graveyard. Regeneration cannot save it. 704.5f

Damage marked at or above toughness – destroyed. Regeneration can save it. 704.5g

A token anywhere but the battlefield stops existing. 704.5d

The seven layers CR 613

Every continuous effect applies in this order, every time the game looks. Not the order they were played – this order.

The stack decides what order effects are created in. Layers decide what order they apply in – and when a spell resolved only breaks ties between effects in the same layer.

APPLIED IN THIS ORDER ↓

LAYER 1 Has its own sublayers. What comes out of it is the copiable values. 613.2 · 613.2c

1	Copy 613.1a	Effects that change copiable values. 1a Copy effects, and merging with a permanent. 613.2a 1b Face-down spells and permanents. 613.2b
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LAYERS 2-6 Characteristic-defining abilities apply first, then everything else in timestamp order. 613.3

2	Control 613.1b	Who controls it.
3	Text 613.1c	Text-changing effects.
4	Type 613.1d	Card type, subtype, supertype.
5	Color 613.1e	Color-changing effects.
6	Abilities 613.1f	Abilities added or removed, and keyword counters.
LAYER 7 Has its own sublayers, and they run in this order regardless of when each effect arrived. 613.4		
7	Power/toughness 613.1g	Everything that touches P/T, in four passes. 7a Characteristic-defining abilities. 613.4a 7b Setting P/T to a specific value. 613.4b 7c Modifying P/T – +X/+X effects and counters. 613.4c 7d Switching P/T. 613.4d

Worked example – inside layer 7 613.4

Gray Ogre 2/2
PLAYED IN THIS ORDER
1 **Bond Beetle** puts a +1/+1 counter on it
2 **Giant Growth** gives it +3/+3
3 **Glorious Anthem** gives your creatures +1/+1
4 **Ovinize** sets base P/T to 0/1

Printed on the card
7b 4 Ovinize sets the base
7c 1 2 3 The three pumps pile on
0+1+3+1 = 5 · 1+1+3+1 = 6

2/2
0/1
5/6

Ovinize was cast last, and it applies first. 7b runs before 7c, so it jumps the queue over all three pumps and becomes the base they build on.

Ovinize also removes abilities, which happens back in layer 6. Gray Ogre has none, so it changes nothing here.

Inside any one layer

Earlier timestamp applies first. 613.7

Unless one effect depends on another – then it waits, and timestamps are overridden. 613.8

Terms & Topics

Fizzle 608.2b

What the table calls a spell whose targets have all become illegal. It leaves the stack without resolving and without being countered. 608.2b

Timestamp

When an object or effect got its stamp. Inside one layer, earlier applies first. Auras and Equipment get a new one each time they attach; permanents get one each time they turn face up or transform. 613.7

Dependency

If applying one effect would change what another one does, the second waits for the first – even when its timestamp is earlier. Effects in a dependency loop just use timestamps. 613.8

Copiable values

The object as it stands after layer 1 and nothing more. Counters, pumps, and control changes are not copiable, which is why a copy of a buffed creature arrives unbuffed. 613.2c

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