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To cast a spell is to take it from where it is (usually the hand), put it on the stack, and pay its costs, so that it will eventually resolve and have its effect. Casting a spell follows the steps listed below, in order. If, at any point during the casting of a spell, a player is unable to comply with any of the steps listed below, the casting of the spell is illegal; the game returns to the moment before that spell started to be cast. Announcements and payments can't be altered after they've been made.

Announce - The card moves from where it is to become the topmost object on the stack.

Choose Options - The player chooses modes, whether to splice any cards onto the spell, any alternative or additional costs that will be paid as it's being cast (such as buyback, kicker, or convoke costs,) and if the spell has a variable cost that will be paid as it's being cast (such as an {X} in its mana cost,) the player announces the value of that variable. A player can't apply two alternative methods of casting or two alternative costs to a single spell.

Target - The player announces his or her choice of an appropriate player, object, or zone for each target the spell requires. The same target can't be chosen multiple times for any one instance of the word "target" on the spell. However, if the spell uses the word "target" in multiple places, the same object, player, or zone can be chosen once for each instance of the word "target".

How to Distribute - If the spell requires the player to divide or distribute an effect (such as damage or counters) among one or more targets, the player announces the division. Each of these targets must receive at least one of whatever is being divided.

Total cost - The player determines the total cost of the spell. The total cost is the mana cost or alternative cost, plus all additional costs and cost increases, and minus all cost reductions. It can't be reduced to less than {0}. Once the total cost is determined, any effects that directly affect the total cost are applied. Then the resulting total cost becomes "locked in." If effects would change the total cost after this time, they have no effect.

Mana abilities - If the total cost includes a mana payment, the player then has a chance to activate mana abilities. Mana abilities must be activated before costs are paid.

Pay all costs - The player pays the total cost in any order. Partial payments are not allowed. Unpayable costs can't be paid.

Once these steps are completed, the spell becomes cast. Any abilities that trigger when a spell is cast or put onto the stack trigger at this time.

A̲ll C̲razy T̲eens H̲ave T̲ried M̲agic P̲ills

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State-based actions are game actions that happen automatically whenever certain conditions are met. State-based actions don't use the stack. Abilities that watch for a specified game state are triggered abilities, not state-based actions. State-based actions are checked throughout the game and are not controlled by any player.

Whenever a player would get priority, the game checks for any of the listed conditions for state-based actions, then performs all applicable state-based actions simultaneously as a single event. If any state-based actions are performed as a result of a check, the check is repeated; otherwise all triggered abilities that are waiting to be put on the stack are put on the stack, then the check is repeated. Once no more state-based actions have been performed as the result of a check and no triggered abilities are waiting to be put on the stack, the appropriate player gets priority. This process also occurs during the cleanup step, except that if no state-based actions are performed as the result of the step's first check and no triggered abilities are waiting to be put on the stack, then no player gets priority and the step ends.

Unlike triggered abilities, state-based actions pay no attention to what happens during the resolution of a spell or ability. If multiple state-based actions would have the same result at the same time, a single replacement effect will replace all of them. The state-based actions are as follows:

- If a player has 0 or less life, he or she loses the game.
- If a player attempted to draw a card from an empty library since the last time state-based actions were checked, he or she loses the game.
- If a player has ten or more poison counters, he or she loses the game.
- If a token is phased out, or is in a zone other than the battlefield, it ceases to exist.
- If a copy of a spell is in a zone other than the stack, it ceases to exist. If a copy of a card is in any zone other than the stack or the battlefield, it ceases to exist.
- If a creature has toughness 0 or less, it's put into its owner's graveyard. Regeneration can't replace this event.
- If a creature has toughness greater than 0, and the total damage marked on it is greater than or equal to its toughness, that creature has been dealt lethal damage and is destroyed. Regeneration can replace this event.
- If a creature has toughness greater than 0, and it's been dealt damage by a source with deathtouch since the last time state-based actions were checked, that creature is destroyed. Regeneration can replace this event.
- If a planeswalker has loyalty 0, it's put into its owner's graveyard.
- If two or more planeswalkers that share a planeswalker type are on the battlefield, all are put into their owners' graveyards. This is called the "planeswalker uniqueness rule."
- If two or more legendary permanents with the same name are on the battlefield, all are put into their owners' graveyards. This is called the "legend rule." If only one of those permanents is legendary, this rule doesn't apply.
- If two or more permanents have the supertype world, all except the one that has been a permanent with the world supertype on the battlefield for the shortest amount of time are put into their owners' graveyards. In the event of a tie for the shortest amount of time, all are put into their owners' graveyards. This is called the "world rule."
- If an Aura is attached to an illegal object or player, or is not attached to an object or player, that Aura is put into its owner's graveyard.
- If an Equipment or Fortification is attached to an illegal permanent, it becomes unattached from that permanent. It remains on the battlefield.
- If a creature is attached to an object or player, it becomes unattached and remains on the battlefield. Similarly, if a permanent that's neither an Aura, an Equipment, nor a Fortification is attached to an object or player, it becomes unattached and remains on the battlefield.
- If a permanent has both a +1/+1 counter and a -1/-1 counter on it, N +1/+1 and N -1/-1 counters are removed from it, where N is the smaller of the number of +1/+1 and -1/-1 counters on it.
- If a permanent with an ability that says it can't have more than N counters of a certain kind on it has more than N counters of that kind on it, all but N of those counters are removed from it.
- In a Two-Headed Giant game, if a team has 0 or less life, that team loses the game.
- In a Commander game, a player that's been dealt 21 or more combat damage by the same commander over the course of the game loses the game.
- In an Archenemy game, if a non-ongoing scheme card is face up in the command zone, and it isn't the source of a triggered ability that has triggered but not yet left the stack, that scheme card is turned face down and put on the bottom of its owner's scheme deck.