THE CASUAL PLANESWALKER'S

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D E C K B U I L D I N G
Kent sends heart-felt thanks to all of the people whose hard work and dedication led to the creation of this book. Thanks also to my amazing family and friends who continuously supported and encouraged us from the early stages of the project.

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Oz would like to thank Pat, without whose encouragement The Casual Planeswalker would not exist, and Dixi, whose artistic contribution really brought the project to life.

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The author would like to thank his family and friends for their encouragement, inspiration, and motivation to complete this project, his associates at The Casual Planeswalker for helping make this vision a reality and ultimately, he would like to thank everyone who ever played a game of Magic with him, especially those who made it fun.
Do you remember the first time you picked up a deck of Magic cards? Whether it was a week or fifteen years ago, the experience was no doubt similar to one shared by millions of players throughout the years.

You were captivated by the dazzling descriptions of sorcery and wizards, fascinating beasts and contraptions, and magnificent landscapes. Picturing in your mind the first onslaught of summoned creatures and warriors marching their way across your enemy’s battle lines to draw blood was a rush. What it all boiled down to was that you were discovering how truly FUN the world of Magic: The Gathering could be.

At The Casual Planeswalker our mission is to return you to that state of pure enjoyment. We will help you improve your game, sharpen your skills, and hone your talents but do so with the ultimate goal of preserving what we believe is the purpose to Magic: The Gathering, which is to have fun.

This book will teach you to make superior, custom-built decks for your play style that are well crafted and fun for you to play and opponents to play against. What the book will not do is teach you how to make top-rated tournament decks that cost hundreds of dollars to maintain. These types of decks certainly have their time and place, but we are concerned with casual play.

We believe that the casual game should always be about gathering around with a group of good friends and enjoying the experience Magic has to offer. This book is meant to be your personal guide to formulating the most interesting and successful decks and strategies for your personal play style. Use it as a reference. Come back to sections of it after the first read if you need to freshen up on certain aspects of your game. Enjoy the looks on your play group’s faces as they wonder why you are suddenly winning so many games. Most of all, enjoy the fact that Magic has never been as fun as it will be after you read this book.

We’re excited to join you on this fascinating journey, Planeswalker. Enjoy the ride!

Sincerely,
The Casual Planeswalker team
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PART ONE: player types
Each of us approaches the game of *Magic: The Gathering* in a different way, drawn to various aspects which we find enjoyable; whether it be experimenting with new cards, playing out a sweet “combo” or just swinging in with the biggest creatures you can find. Regardless of the appeal, each of us has one thing in common, the *Magic* deck. Without it, one is simply just another Trading Card Collector.

Building a good deck is what proves your mettle as a *Magic* player – building one that consistently proves itself in battle between you and your friends. If you do not include the right amount of consideration and preparedness, a deck can be just an ineffective assortment of cards. What you will begin to notice the longer you play *Magic* is that each of your decks will have a certain flair to it; something that you contribute as a deckbuilder, even if you are copying the deck offline. This is your inner player showing himself within your deckbuilding process.

There are three types of *Magic* players that exist, according to those in the know, which are fondly referred to as: Timmy, Johnny, and Spike. Each of these “player types” have different desires when it comes to building a deck, infusing their playing style and deckbuilding process with their own approach to the game. Learning which type of player you are is the first step to mastering the art of deckbuilding.

“Learning which type of player you are is the first step to mastering the art of deckbuilding.”
Let’s begin with Timmy. According to Magic lore, Mark Rosewater was the first to give this label to those players who are also known as power gamers; players who like to have fun, win huge victories, and use gigantic creatures to do so. Bigger is better to the Timmy player. This is a player who gets his jollies from throwing a Darksteel Colossus on the table cackling as their opponents suffer 11 points of indestructible, trampling damage each turn.

This player likes to win but doesn’t mind losing so long as his victories are significantly impressive. To a Timmy player, winning with the biggest creature possible is much more impressive than slowly poking an opponent to death with a single 1/1 or 2/2 creature. If Timmy is going to win with 1/1 creatures, there had better be tons of them. Timmy players want to live it up and be able to leave a game table with a new story about some incredible victory.

So what kind of deck does a Timmy build? A Timmy player is most likely to build an aggressive, creature-based deck. These decks win with swarms of creatures or through the strength of a handful of powerful creatures.

Specifically, Timmys will lean towards building tribal decks (decks with most of the creatures of the same creature type) since they might find a specific creature suits their fancy, and its brethren not only do neat things, but they also function together. Elf decks suggest a Timmy player, which is only confirmed when they reach over to pull out their Dragon deck. Dragons are often Timmy cards since they are big, flying, and often do something cool.
What Timmy could resist the lure of any of these?

While tribal decks are a big Timmy favorite, it is only scratching the surface of the decks that Timmy players enjoy. Timmys are also known to make decks stuffed with as many big and intimidating creatures as they can find. I personally have a deck that makes use of Kavu Predator – which I consider my most Timmy-like deck. A decklist is included in Appendix B.

A comprehensive analysis of Timmy-like decks will be included later in the book in addition to effective deckbuilding strategies for these types of decks.
Moving away from Timmy, the next player on the list is the Johnny player. A Johnny player looks at the individual interactions of cards and finds joy in the most amazing combinations of cards.

A Johnny’s ultimate goal is to prove that any card, no matter how hideously bad, can be used in conjunction with another card so that the end result is victory (or something close to it). Johnny players want to prove that something can be done even if it requires the most convoluted combination of cards.

For this player, the fun of the game comes from the creation of the deck, the thrill of hunting down specific cards that allow them to do the things that they want to do. A Johnny player enjoys the process of building the deck. A Johnny player might have a lot of difficulty using someone else’s deck, simply because they didn’t make it themselves.

For the Johnny player, the game is a proving ground of their creativity; if a Johnny player can get their deck to do the one thing that it was built it to do, the Johnny player has succeeded.

Johnny players usually like decks that revolve around the interaction of multiple cards. They don’t necessarily have to build a deck that uses bad cards and makes them good, but they do enjoy the interaction of the cards.

Johnny decks have the tendency to be full of cards that rely upon each other to succeed. A good example of this is the cycling mechanic. Johnny might stuff his deck with a bunch of cycling creatures, a few Fluctuator, and a couple of Living Death to put them all back into play for one big win.
The deck’s the thing; however, winning is still important to a Johnny player, but winning through the proper functioning of their deck is the ultimate victory for this player type. In multiplayer, a Johnny will be just as content defeating only one opponent with their deck’s intended strategy as they would be with defeating every opponent.

A potential drawback to being a Johnny deck builder is that in the struggle to create decks out of increasingly bizarre combos, Johnny players tend to create increasingly convoluted decks.

Trying to create decks out of entirely improbable combinations can lead to decks that almost never deliver. Creating decks that use likely combinations of cards and that will function consistently is something that Johnnys need to focus on. How frustrating is it to have only two of the four cards you need for your “ultimate combo.”
If your deck only focuses on one thing, you might begin to run into issues. Specifically, if your deck has only one way to win and that is through a complex combination of cards, you will most likely have a hard time achieving victory. There should always be a Plan B, be it beating the opponent down with 1/1 creatures or drawing them out, a combo deck should have an alternate method of winning.

A Johnny can have a neat idea in theory, but when a deck needs more than four pieces for a “combo”, the deck begins stretching too thin and you run the risk of NEVER winning OR getting your combo. These problems can be fixed as they are addressed in the Combo section, later in the book.
Better known as the “tournament player”, Spike players are players who like to win simply for the sake of winning. Competition is what drives them to play the game, and they play the game for the prestige of being the best.

A lot of non-Spike players may tend to dislike Spike, because they may think that Spike has too big of an ego. Spike says the proof is in the pudding… whatever that means.

There are those Spike players who aren’t tournament-goers, who simply enjoy the aspect of winning, or they enjoy the promise of power that comes with having the strongest deck at the table.

These casual Spikes have a tendency to try and dominate group games, manipulate other players, and hold their trump cards until the last minute when they can wipe any other players out of the way and claim victory for themselves.

Being a Spike is not necessarily a negative term, as some players might think. Instead of enjoying the prospect of having the biggest creature on the table or pulling off some crazy combo, Spike players enjoy winning.

Simplistic as it may seem, it validates their experience with the game when they can walk away with as many victories as possible. Their opponent might have had them on the ropes, but as long as they squeeze out the victory, the game was worth it for them.

But what do Spike players like to play? It is difficult to pinpoint a specific deck type for Spike players because these players primarily enjoy the aspect of winning as opposed to what they are winning with.
A player doesn’t have to own expensive cards and pull the best decks off the internet in order to be a better player.

Control decks, decks that force the game in a certain direction are the most commonly utilized Spike deck, but they are not necessarily the deck of choice for all Spike players.

Since Spike players like to win, they will build whatever deck wins them the most games, which might mean that they drift into Timmy and Johnny territory in their deckbuilding.

The more powerful decks, better cards, and quantity of wins are those things which Spike players find the most important in their gaming experience.

Drawbacks to being a Spike player include attempting to wield powers outside of your control – using expensive cards or through net decks. The term net deck refers to copying someone’s deck from online – one that has been used by many players or has garnished many wins from tournaments.

Some Spike players can become focused on using only the “best” cards, without an understanding of how or why those cards are good. Continuously buying these cards can be expensive, and reliance on only the “best” cards can be limiting in your casual gaming experience – not to mention costly.

The process of deckbuilding is an integral part of being a casual player. Certainly the experience of winning and having good cards is a fun one, but building, playing, and winning with a deck that was built on your own is a victory in and of itself.

A player doesn’t have to own expensive cards and pull the best decks off the internet in order to be a better player, and learning how to build decks in addition to how those decks work is an essential skill for all Magic players.
PART TWO: deck types
Now that we know what type of player you are, the next step to building an ultimate deck is just as crucial: What type of deck will you use to destroy your opponents?

Each Player type tends to lead the individual to utilize specific deck types that suit his fancy and accomplish his goals. For example, a true Timmy might have three different decks, all of which do fundamentally the same thing: smash face hard, harder, and hardest using big, bigger and biggest creatures.

Timmy does what Timmy likes. Therefore, Timmy tends to be an aggro player.

Before you get confused by the terminology, (don’t scoff, some people do!) allow me to explain. There are three types of decks: Aggro, Combo, and Control. Deck types tend to be exclusive; however, sometimes there is slight overlap with the other types. For the most part though, they stick to their own guns.
Aggro decks contain lots of creatures and like to win by dropping their opponent’s life totals to zero as fast as they can. Aggro decks achieve victory by dropping threat after threat on the board until their opponents are overwhelmed by the sheer combined power of the “beat-sticks” smacking him.

Aggro decks can vary from simplistic to complex and encompass a wide variety of decklists. As previously stated, sending in all your creatures for the final strike is usually what defines a deck as an aggro deck.

The colors that best define aggro are green, red, and white. Based on the characteristics of these colors, they contain the potential to have powerful creatures in large supply for relatively low costs. Blue and Black are not devoid of powerful creatures, but they usually have a high cost or drawback. It is very rare to see blue or black aggro decks.

Keyword abilities that are possessed by green, red, and white are also what make them powerful colors in the realm of the aggro deck. Green has trample, red has haste, and white has first strike, all of which give them a competitive edge over other colors. These abilities are what make them successful in the early game, allowing them to deal damage quickly without worrying about blockers or other creatures.

Good aggro decks are those that strive to establish a good board position early and immediately begin swinging for the fences, hoping to avoid a Wrath of God or Evacuation that might ruin their day. However, even these effects might only temporarily stall some decks; aggro decks have a tendency to recover quickly and get back to what they do best; smash.
Good aggro creatures tend to have *trample*, *haste*, or are big enough to make a player think twice before throwing their creatures in the way. Aggressive creatures will make your opponent slump and sigh at the sight of them, frustrated that they are yet again going to take a beatdown from a horde of hasty, trample-y, tough guys.

A good example of creatures that are hasty, trample-y and big are:

**Ball Lightning**

*Creature–Elemental*  
*RRR*  
*Trample, Haste*  

At the beginning of the end step, sacrifice Ball Lightning.

6/1

and his cousin:

**Groundbreaker**

*Creature–Elemental*  
*GGG*  
*Trample, Haste*  

At the beginning of the end step, sacrifice Groundbreaker.

6/1

While these creatures have low costs for high damage, their drawbacks are their low toughness points. Even a 1/1 can ruin their day if that 1/1 happens to have *first strike*.

A common misconception among some *Magic* players is that aggro decks require no thinking, relying on the monotonous act of repeated attacks to accomplish their goal. This is not true.

The goal of an aggro player is to force the opponent to choose the wrong creature to block, simply because it poses a bigger threat at the moment. For example, if you are being stared down by one of the above-mentioned elementals in addition to some other 4/2 creature with trample, which of the two are you more likely to block?
Of course, it depends on what creatures you have available for blocking, and your current life total. Many players might immediately choose to block the 6/1, simply because more points of damage are involved.

The thing some players fail to think about is that the 6/1 is only going to exist for one turn because of its ability that requires it to be sacrificed at end of turn. On the other hand, the other creature will stick around for many turns and keep attacking for four points of damage each time. The trick is in getting your opponent to take more damage by avoiding frightening potential damage.

Aggressive decks are not simply based around trample-y creatures that have the most points of damage. Other decks may have smaller creatures with more threatening cards, like *Sword of Fire and Ice*, *Loxodon Warhammer* or *Umezawa’s Jitte* to enhance the threat of their creatures.
A *Kird Ape* is not as threatening alone as it is when it comes after you wielding one of these Equipment. The best part about Equipment is that your opponents can kill your creatures, but the Equipment will remain in play, ready to attach to another creature that comes into play.

Enchantments may have cool abilities, but if your opponent kills your enchanted creature, you’ve lost two cards for your opponent’s one.

The point of an aggro deck is not to be filled to the brim with creatures, lands, and nothing else, but to have a good amount of creatures, and other spells that enhance the overall performance of the deck. We will discuss “staying focused” later in this book as it is a point of consideration for all decks, including the aggro deck.

For the most part, staying focused will mean that you aren’t going to put in cards to protect against each and every thing you can think of. You should not completely fill your deck with enchantments that protect your creatures, give them shroud, and protect them from colors. You will eventually fail to draw creatures if you obsess too much with keeping them safe. Likewise, if you fill your deck with too many spells that kill your opponents’ creatures, you might fail to draw any creatures to attack back with.

Some of your creatures will die in a game of *Magic*; that is a fact. Aggro decks are usually okay with this, because they will often have more creatures in-hand to take the place of their fallen comrades. This is the edge that the aggro deck must focus on in order to win. Concerning yourself with anything else wastes the potential of the deck.

An example of a good, fun, and relatively cheap aggro deck is available for viewing in Appendix A.
A quick aside, the “burn deck” technically fits into the category of an aggro deck, though it runs much fewer creatures than the typical aggro deck.

Instead of creatures, burn decks use instant and sorceries that read “This card deals ~ damage to target creature or player” and knock points off their opponents’ life total off in that way. Instead of attacking, a burn deck turns its mana directly into damage.

The all star of the burn deck is *Lightning Bolt*, which is practically essential. For those of you not currently in possession of a playset (four of), I would strongly recommend getting them before you try to build yourself a burn deck.

Burn decks are interesting because while they offer potential in damage, they have a very difficult time against decks containing a lot of creatures. This is because they have very little to use to protect themselves with.

Sacrificing a burn spell to kill an opponent’s creature means that you have one less spell directed at your opponent’s life total. Therefore, a good burn deck requires that you efficiently utilize your spells and focus on your opponent. Worry about your own life total when it gets closer to zero.
A weenie deck is a very specific type of aggro deck. These decks usually consist of low-powered, low-cost creatures, and are usually white decks. They utilize powerful cards like *Swords to Plowshares* to remove their opponent’s creatures and make room on the table for large amounts of damage from plenty of small bodies.

These decks are usually not tied together by any tribal-based theme. Instead, they often employ a random assortment of aggressive creatures to get the job done.

*Silver Knight* is a good example of an aggressive, powerful weenie creature. Two white mana for a 2/2 creature with first strike and protection from red is a pretty good deal. Many weenie decks utilize this and other similar cards in their decks.

These decks work through the low cost of the creatures, allowing for an early, dominant board position which allows them to quickly threaten their opponents’ life totals.

The low cost of creatures allows them to be played early and attack promptly. Using low cost spells is efficient, giving opponents very little breathing space if they want to keep themselves at a safe life total.

Also, having low costing creatures allows weenie decks to use Equipment that greatly enhance the power of their creatures. As mentioned before, *Sword of Fire and Ice, Umezawa’s Jitte*, and *Loxodon Warhammer* are all good enough to turn a single 2/2 into a force to be reckoned with.
The Beats deck is a hybrid aggro deck that employs several tactics in its overall strategy. This type of aggro deck uses fairly small but aggressive creatures in conjunction with burn spells and spells that pump their creatures. They may even stretch to include some creature equipments or enchantments.

This form of an aggro deck tends to be very fun to play – combining quick beats with burn to make for a deck that is quite capable of running over a wide variety of opponents’ decks.

Powerful cards in this aggro subgroup are pump spells like Giant Growth, Rancor, and Might of Oaks. Adding red to the deck allows for other pump spells in addition to burn spells like Lightning Bolt and Shock.

This deck relies on the weenie strategy of throwing out as many low-cost creatures as possible and supporting them with pump spells to make them big threats and big damage. Rancor is a powerful card in this deck since it acts as a recyclable trample enabler.

A lot of beats decks use the burn as a tool to hit things that they can’t kill outright with their creatures. Pump spells should be withheld until blockers are assigned, allowing the player to pump the unblocked creature or kill an opponent’s creature by pumping their own to outmatch their opponent’s creature.
When playing an aggro deck, it is important to keep in mind the amount of turns it takes to get up to twenty points of damage. As an aggro deck, it is important that this series of turns (often referred to as a “clock” of your opponent’s turns left in the game) does not draw out too long.

“The clock” is an important concept to any deck, especially the aggro deck. By putting out a 2/2 on turn one, you have created a time limit for your opponent to deal with the threat. If left unchecked, that single creature will kill him in ten turns.

The clock is especially significant when you have a particular threat that the opponent cannot deal with, like a 6/6 trample creature or a 4/4 flying creature.

A well-honed aggro deck will work like a clock, establishing a pace with which the opponent must keep up, or else they will lose. As stated before, an aggro deck desires to win quickly; attacking each opportunity is part of this method.

If this hasn’t been made clear yet, an aggro deck must win quickly. If an aggro deck is consistently failing to achieve twenty or more points of damage within five to ten turns, the deck is either having a very bad streak of luck or is simply not aggressive enough.

A good look at deckbuilding strategies will help those of you with slow aggro decks to get an understanding of what deckbuilding should be like.

You can look in Appendix A to see a good aggro deck and a short analysis of why it works.
Whereas the aggro deck desires to win by reducing its opponent’s life total to zero as fast as possible, the control deck usually wins through this same process but at a much slower rate.

This is because the control deck uses a different approach to attacking its opponents down to zero life points, preferring instead to clear the board, extinguish its opponent’s resources, and establish a dominant board position before doing much else.

The idea of “controlling” the momentum of the game is the essential aspect of being a control player. Being in control of the game means that the control player is monitoring and restricting the opponent’s means of playing spells or attacking.

Is that spell going to be a problem for you? Counterspell. Too many creatures on the board? Wrath of God. These are spells that tend to be utilized by control decks.

Spike players tend to gravitate toward playing control decks, because it gives them a feeling of dominance over the game, and also because control decks tend to do well in competitive formats.

Since Spike players like to win, the control deck is a perfect match, because it constantly feels like it is winning. For example: ensuring that the opponent is not playing their best spells, keeping his powerful creatures on the board, or doing anything that the control player would find to be unfavorable.
Control colors tend to dominate the opposite side of the color wheel than aggro decks; strongly suited to blue, black, and white. These colors specialize in controlling the opponent’s spells, cards in hand, and creatures; countering, discarding, and destroying those things that would threaten one’s life total.

Blue is predominantly a control color, labeled as a brooding, cunning, and intellect-based color. Blue utilizes counter-magic that prevents its opponents from playing spells, creating a “permission” game. “I play Serra Avenger,” you might announce. “No.” is the blue mage’s reply, as he taps his two untapped Islands and reveals a Counterspell from his hand.

Preventing your opponent from playing their spells is the object in a blue mage’s game. Of course, countering is not all that a blue mage can do. Redirecting spells or abilities is also a potent weapon, in addition to reducing the strength of your opponents’ creatures by giving them -X/-0 until end of turn with certain spells.

Black relies on preventing its opponent from playing spells by ripping those spells directly out of its opponent’s hand or deck through a variety of spells. Powerful cards like Hymn to Tourach, Duress, and Terror are examples of cards that control the opponent’s progression of spells through discard and creature control.

Black spells empty their opponent’s hand and keep it empty, which prevents their opponent from recovering and ensures that their opponent won’t be playing any more threatening spells.
Hypnotic Specter is nearly a staple for mono-black control decks, since it deals two points of damage AND forces your opponent to discard a card at random.

It is interesting that white can be both an aggro color and a control color, demonstrating an overlap between aggro and control. While white is predominantly an aggro color, it has a wide variety of spells that serve to control as well. Swords to Plowshares, Path to Exile, Wing Shards, and Wrath of God are just some examples of ways in which white has access to controlling cards.

These cards allow the white deck to keep its opponents in check, preventing the opponent’s creatures from being effective or threatening. Additionally, cards like Orim’s Chant and Abeyance prevent an opponent from playing his spells, holding him off for a turn and effectively ending his turn at times.

On its own, each of these colors might have difficulty with controlling a game in its entirety, but when they are combined, they provide for some powerful color interactions.
What a lot of people don’t realize about control decks is that not only do they have the ability to control the game with the cards physically in their hands, but also those cards that they could potentially have in their hands. As the flavor text of *Browbeat* states: “Even the threat of power has power.”

Keeping the cards in your hand secret is an integral part of playing a control deck. Don’t make a move unless you are sure it is the right one. Additionally, considering each move your opponent makes is a powerful tool. If they think that you are considering countering one of their spells, they might play differently, more reluctantly, and hold off playing an important spell because they think you have a counterspell in your hand.
The Control Deck: a waiting game

“By threatening your opponent with the unknown cards in your hand, you can trap him in a mind game that controls his style of play.”

By the time he actually plays the spell he doesn’t want countered, you might have the spell you need to deal with it in hand, even if you didn’t have it before. By threatening your opponent with the unknown cards in your hand, you can trap him in a mind game that controls his style of play.

Playing a waiting game means that you are simply waiting until you have the tools that you need to win the game; both your “win condition” and the means to protect it.

Control players need to remember that they should not play too quickly; they should draw their opponent out before beginning any retaliation of their own.

A control player needs to focus less on their own life total, and instead recognize the measure of “winning” is instead reliant on board position and something called “card advantage” which will be discussed in a later section.

Control decks win through dominance over the board, by removing or nullifying all of their opponents’ threats and ensuring that the opponents are unable to regain any ground. Once the opponent is in lockdown, victory is ensured for the control player, who can then begin reducing the life total of the opponent to zero.
Counterspells are an essential part of control decks as a means of protection from any big threat. They cost a variety of mana, but the most used among casual players is plain old Counterspell.

Also referred to as “the dreaded two blue,” Counterspell revolves around the idea that in order to counter a spell on your opponent’s turn, a control player will leave two of his mana untapped to demonstrate his intention to counterspell.

Leaving islands untapped (or any source of blue mana) will convince your opponent that you might possess some form of counter-magic. Seeing this might threaten them into thinking that they won’t succeed in playing their spell. Untapped lands and cards in hand are essential to the success of a control deck.

A lot of good control decks out there in a more competitive format called Legacy revolve around the card Force of Will, a powerful counterspell, as a means to protect from a wide variety of spells.

In fact, Force of Will is a staple in most competitive control decks in the formats of Legacy and Vintage, because it can be played without mana, instead taking a blue card in your hand and one life point.
Fortunately, being a casual player means that it will be highly unlikely that you will ever see Force of Will in your playgroup. With the exception, of course, if you happen to be an older player from the early days of magic and are in possession of a few of those cards. Casual players living outside of those specific cases are fortunate, and it is unlikely that they will ever see that card.

Casual players might see free counterspells in less potent variations, such as Disrupting Shoal, or Pact of Negation.

The point is that free counterspells in general are very powerful, because they are a surprise to the opponent. Your opponent may see all of your mana is tapped and expect to be safe playing a spell when, in fact, you have a means of denying him his spell.
Control decks come in a variety of forms; some mono-colored, some multi-colored. However, all of these control decks have one purpose in mind – to prevent their opponent from playing spells or gaining ground.

Mono-colored control decks are the easiest to build, because they rely on only one kind of mana which comes consistently and reliably in the form of basic lands. When you mix colors for control decks, you may develop a problem with consistency.

Mono-blue control decks are the most common form of control decks out in the casual atmosphere. These decks utilize counterspells, bounce spells like Unsummon, and other “tricky” spells to control and eventually overwhelm the opponent.

Creatures in a mono-blue control deck should have some form of evasion in order to reduce an opponent’s life total. Creatures with flying or unblockable are likely to fit into this category. Big creatures with the unblockable ability will allow a blue deck to swing for the fences in the late game.

The proper selection of creatures to support the blue control deck is part of the deck’s success. After all, you will need something to win the game for you.

Black control decks often go about an alternate way of nullifying the effects of their opponents’ cards. Using discard spells like Duress and Hymn to Tourach, a mono black deck removes the threatening cards from its opponent’s deck and destroys the momentum of other decks, by causing them to pitch good cards from their hands.
Usually, when you keep your hand at the beginning of the game, you are expecting to be able to play your hand in its entirety. The mono-black control deck will throw a wrench in these plans by getting rid of the good cards that the opponent was about to play.

Using board clearing effects and “destroy” spells is another aspect of the mono-black control deck that allows it to keep ahead of its opponents. Using spells that destroy all creatures is not a huge setback for black control decks.

Mono-black decks are built to recover from the global setbacks they cause, delaying to play their creatures early on in the game in order to draw their opponent out.

White control decks are fewer in number among casual players and primarily because they require quite a variety of expensive cards in order to work well.

*Orim’s Chant* is an excellent example of a card whose effectiveness is abused in white-control decks. On an *Isochron Scepter*, *Orim’s Chant* can stop the opponent from attacking or playing spells for the rest of the game.

As a casual player, a white control deck is likely going to be outside of your desire to play or build. The cards needed to play them are complicated, requiring precise timing to know when to most effectively play.

Additionally, playing them casually will likely only annoy the people you are playing with because they slow the game down drastically by destroying lands, creatures, or other nonland permanents.
A toolkit deck is a type of control deck that has some method of finding, fixing, and adapting to any deck it may come up against. A lot of one-of creatures or spells are included because the deck may have some method of searching them out.

Toolkit decks are sometimes referred to as “silver bullet” decks, because they have answers to nearly any deck they play against. Using methods of searching out spells that will help them win or get around certain obstacles is a vital characteristic of toolkit decks.

Cards that provide answers to specific problems are good examples of cards that a toolkit deck will employ. For instance, if an opponent has a particularly obnoxious enchantment, a toolkit deck will be able to search out its card that serves to destroy enchantments.

Toolkit decks may also use “draw engines,” spells or cards that help them to draw more cards, which will allow them to sift through enough cards to find the answers that will allow them to ensure victory.

These decks rely on many creatures that have “comes into play” or activated abilities in order to deal with their opponents’ permanents, creatures, and life totals. *Viridian Shaman* is an example of a utility creature that these decks might employ, getting rid of single targets that may be a threat.
Using cards that look outside of the game for cards that you own is another method of using a “toolkit” strategy. The *Wish* cards from *Judgment* and more recently, *Futuresight’s Glittering Wish* are examples of cards that will look for answers outside of the game that will help ensure victory for a toolkit deck.

One drawback of a toolkit deck is that it might employ too many expensive cards for a casual player. Yet, the idea of employing creatures or spells that will help solve problems your deck may encounter is a good strategy in building your deck.
Playing a control deck requires patience, so impatient players should steer clear of playing one. Thinking, considering, deliberating, and taking slow turns are characteristic of control players since their moves have to guide the course of the game.

Control decks must focus on the long term goal in addition to the short term effects of their actions. Playing a spell too early or playing the wrong spell can be fatal in the long run for these decks.

It does depend on what type of control deck you are playing, but as a whole, control players need to think much more carefully about their moves than other decks.

Keep the spells dedicated to your goal of controlling your opponent focusing less on creatures. Obviously, most decks will need creatures to have a way of winning, but creatures play a smaller role in control decks than they do in aggro decks. They serve the same purpose, but they do it at a slower pace.
Combo decks revolve around a series of cards that seek to create a chain reaction which will hopefully result in victory for the combo deck’s controller.

I say “hopefully” because, like with any other deck, a combo deck might just draw all of the wrong cards or not have all of the right pieces in order to “combo out”. Combo decks are a gamble. Sometimes they will work, other times they won’t.

Combo decks have to be honed in to doing what they are expected to do; each card in the deck is carefully included to contribute to the other cards that make up the combo, which will enhance its overall chance of winning.

Combo decks usually have some mechanic that allows them to either draw a lot of cards to find the spells they need to win, or they simply rely on the luck of the draw and a few search spells to win. Examples of cards that help focus a combo deck are *Brainstorm*, *Diabolic Tutor*, and *Gamble*.

To have a good combo deck, you need to have cards that are going to interact with each other with a highly beneficial outcome. Many times it is as simple as a two card combination that allows you to put out an infinite number of tokens such as *Earthcraft* and *Squirrel’s Nest* (a combo I would seriously suggest against, if you want your friends to ever play with you again).

Another combo strategy includes building a sequence of spells played that allow you to rack up a lot of spells using the “storm” mechanic, and end up playing a *Dragonstorm* for oodles of dragons, or a *Tendrils of Agony* for an equal amount of damage.
“Milling” cards (a term referring to a card known as Millstone) refers to the process of forcing the opponent to run out of cards in their library. When an opponent has no cards left in his or her library, and they cannot draw another card, they lose the game. Milling is usually utilized in combo or control decks as a strategy for winning as well.

As a casual player, you might find plenty of cheap spells that easily create an infinite combo of damage, creatures, or milled cards. The trick is that many of these combos require a variety of different cards in order to work.

For some people, the process of finding out if it works or not is just as fun as winning, and for those hard core Johnnys, it is worth it. However, it is important to realize when a combo is feasible, and when it is not.

Having too costly a combo is also something that players should avoid. If one part of the combo costs five mana and the other costs eight, the chances of getting that combo to work is low. You will likely be on at least turn eight before you have both pieces of your combo.

To protect yourself, you will have to include cards outside of your combo. This will ultimately dilute the effectiveness of your deck, and can make the deck too cumbersome to play.

Beware of trying to include too many cards in combos. You can find many cards that will create a “combo” if played or activated in a certain order; however, many times they require five or more cards in order to do this. Using too many cards in a combo makes it ineffective because you will clog your deck with the pieces and find you will never draw the entire combo.
Synergy is an important aspect to the game of Magic, and while it is often labeled as a “combo” by many players, it is actually an effective interaction between cards. Synergy is what nullifies some of the drawbacks of many cards.

For example, if a card requires you to discard as a part of its cost, Squee, Goblin Nabob can be used to nullify the drawback of discarding, because it returns to your hand each turn.

Synergy will make the difference between a good deck and a better one, because the interaction of cards allows the deck to run more efficiently. A deck that revolves around the synergy between its creatures or spells will be effective because it becomes self-sustaining.

Looking for interesting interactions between cards is an important aspect of deckbuilding, and is examined in the deckbuilding section.

**The Combo Deck recap**

Remember to keep your combos simpler in order to have more effective combos. Searching out what you need also helps; spells like Trinket Mage or Diabolic Tutor can find cards that are a part of the winning combo.

Combo decks need to focus more on getting their combos out and less on fitting more combos within the deck. Keep it simple, and keep it effective.
PART THREE: casual deckbuilding
How much do you want to spend on your deck? This is often an important question to many players. A lot of people want a fun deck, but don’t want to spend a lot of money on it.

Keeping a deck cheap but fun is not always easy. Sometimes there are just no substitutions for the cards that you need for a deck. A good thing to do is set out a budget beforehand, so that when it comes down to it, you will allow yourself only so much money in building the deck. You can pick up more pieces when you want to invest more money in the deck later.

One thing to think about is if the deck that you want to build is worth it. It may seem fun or interesting in theory, but in practicality, you may never win a single game with it.

What do you do to avoid this? Playtest.

There are a variety of ways to playtest a deck idea, to ensure that it works. Even professional magic players playtest their decks simply to see how well they will hold up against other professional decks. Similarly, playtesting your own idea will prove how successful your deck will be when you have assembled it.

One way to approach the idea of playtesting is by creating proxies, or fake replicas, of the card or cards you want to use. Many players do this by writing the names and abilities of the proxied card on basic lands. This way, they are indistinguishable from other cards in the deck, and you can use them as though they were the real thing.
Another way to approach the idea of playtesting is through a variety of downloadable programs that you can find online that allow you to create decks. You can then test them on the computer, either playing alone or against other people online to see how well they work.

Using programs online such as Apprentice or Magic Workstation will provide you with free ways to test your deck before you buy or trade for the cards you need.

Playtesting will ultimately save you money on decks, showing you what works and what doesn’t. Everyone has had a deck that they think will be amazing, only to find out that it takes too long to do what they wanted to do, or it has debilitating weaknesses against many decks.

Saving yourself money will increase your enjoyment of the game when you only spend money on cards that are going to be worth it.

Speaking of worthwhile cards, there are always a few cards that will always be worth it to purchase because they are always going to be useful. Pain lands (lands that tap for two colors but deal one damage to you) like Yavimaya Coast or Caves of Koilos are an example of cards that are not too expensive and will almost always be useful in making decks that use more than one color.

Similarly, Birds of Paradise, Wrath of God, and Lightning Bolt are going to remain worth it because of their power level. Additionally, the price of these cards have hardly varied in the time that they’ve been printed and are not likely to vary in the future, so they are a solid investment, monetarily.
Returning to the idea of proxy cards, there are alternatives that a casual player unwilling to invest much money into his or her deck may use to imitate the more powerful abilities of these cards. While you are getting a similar effect, the alternatives usually have a higher cost, or some other drawback that makes them not as effective.

Here are some examples of powerful cards, and their alternatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birds of Paradise</th>
<th>Gemhide Sliver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pernicious Deed</td>
<td>Plague Boiler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground River</td>
<td>Salt Marsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swords to Plowshares</td>
<td>Condemn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damnation</td>
<td>Infest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrath of God</td>
<td>Nearly every set has a cheesy Wrath knockoff you can get for next to nothing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admittedly, these cards aren’t perfect alternatives, but they may still suit the needs of most casual players. If you desire the powerful effects the expensive cards provide, you should just invest directly in those cards.

Another way to find an alternative to the card you want is by going through Magic’s card database – The Gatherer. With this website, you can enter an ability and see what other existing cards produce a similar effect. This way, you can find cheaper alternatives that you may already possess or that you did not even know existed.
Finally, we get to the meat and potatoes: building the deck. We’ll begin with the basics, because sometimes people neglect simple aspects of deckbuilding, which is why their decks fail.

One of the most important aspects of deckbuilding that many beginners fail to understand is that a good deck must be as close to 60 cards as possible in order to be effective. This has to do with chance, percentages, and other numerical issues that a casual player really doesn’t care to deal with. The point is that when you begin to exceed 60 cards, the chances of getting one specific card in the deck gets lower.

Say you need to draw a kill spell in order to survive against your opponent’s huge creature. If you have too many cards in your deck, the chance of you getting one card out of it is much lower than it would be with a deck of normal size.

Additionally, including too many cards makes the building process much more complicated. A good deck needs a certain ratio of lands to nonland cards, and this ratio becomes less clear when more cards are included in the deck.

Decks too large not only affect your own playing, but the playing of those around you. I once knew someone who had an “artifact deck” that was nearly 300 cards. We hated playing against it, not because it was a good deck, but because it took him so long to shuffle. It was also the perfect example of trying to do too many things with your deck.

Keeping your deck down in card number is important to the game as a whole.
Keeping your deck down in number will also help keep the deck focused. Oftentimes, new deckbuilders will have difficulty keeping their decks focused because they don’t know what they want their decks to do.

Get an idea of what you want to do first. Building any deck requires a central idea, concept or framework to develop. Many times the interaction between new cards and old ones will inspire a player to build a deck around them.

An example of this is a deck that I personally built around the interaction between Kavu Predator and older cards like Invigorate and Skyshroud Cutter that can give your opponent life instead of paying their mana costs. Kavu Predator gets a +1/+1 counter for each life point an opponent gains, so these cards have much desired synergy, and they give an otherwise conditional creature a purpose in the deck. The focus of my deck is Kavu Predator, so my deck focuses on finding him, getting him out, and pumping him as quickly as possible. For a reference to my Kavu Predator decklist, see Appendix B.

Focusing your deck means you want to have a central idea, win condition, or other focal point that you first define and then support with other cards. In my deck, I’ve identified that I want to win with Kavu Predator. The rest of the deck is filled with creatures that pump him in order and make him a huge threat.

Compiling a focused deck can take time. The original build of my Kavu Predator deck lacked a true focus. It revolved around the same idea of giving the opponent life, but by including cards like Shielding Plax, Inviolability, and Pariah, in addition to a few, more cumbersome creatures, such as Nomad Mystic, Phytohydra, and Weathered Bodyguards, it remained unfocused.
While the deck was able to come through at times, it more often lost. None of these cards had any true synergy and none of them contributed to the focus of the deck. Instead of making the deck more aggressive, they were one or two-piece cumbersome combinations that sought to protect my life total.

If my goal was to make my Kavu Predator as big as possible, then these cards contradicted and detracted from the focus of my deck. To enhance its overall performance, I rebuilt my deck to focus it on being more aggressive.

Another folly that some new deckbuilders make is including any creature card that “fits” their deck’s colors. They include the creature card because it fits the colors rather than because it fits the strategy.

Some of these players might automatically throw in a few of these creatures because they are big and flashy or because they think it is the coolest creature they’ve ever laid eyes on. This creature may not fit the overall “theme” of their deck, but they put it in because they liked it.

Careful inclusion versus impulsive inclusion helps when building decks. What you don’t want to do is throw in a few copies of a new, huge creature just because it can fit into your deck. Instead, make sure it suits your deck. If not, maybe it’s best not to include it.

An example of poor inclusion would be including a creature from the Shards of Alara with the devour mechanic in a deck that is full of non-expendable creatures. You don’t want to sacrifice your creatures, so your devour creature is useless.
Another example would be if you were to put *Stoic Angel* into your aggro deck. Without the ability to untap more than one creature, your aggro deck will be slowed down.

Make sure the creature belongs in the deck before you put it in the deck.
Deckbuilding is also a reflection of your metagame. For those of you not familiar with this term, the metagame is the type of decks you consistently see in your playgroup. Also referred to as “the meta”, it refers to the decks that people are playing.

Who is playing what decks? What are the cards that are threats? What do I consistently lose to? These are questions that identify the elements of each playgroup’s metagame. All Magic decks undergo transformation as new cards come out and people begin to use them. Constantly adjusting to your play group is an important part of deckbuilding.

For instance, if you play with people who use a lot of artifacts, you will want some form of artifact removal in your decks to handle them. Additionally, if your friends are playing with a lot of creatures, you will want single-target kill spells to get rid of the more threatening ones. Retaining your deck’s focus is essential, but making metagame adjustments could be the key to winning the game.

The Basics recap

Let’s recap. When you start building your deck, remember to:

- Keep it close to 60 cards
- Keep it focused
- Carefully select your cards
- Adjust to the metagame
Examining and correcting the manabase of a deck is a tricky subject, even for professional players. It can take quite a bit of refinement to achieve maximum potential for getting the right cards. Fortunately, being a casual player, you don’t need to be as competitive — making your manabase easier to deal with.
Regardless of what kind of deck you are building, a mono-colored aggro deck, or a multicolored control deck, the curve of your deck is an important issue to examine.

What is “curve”? The curve is the average mana cost of each of the spells in your deck. Typically, you want to have spells for each mana cost in your deck, allowing you to play a spell every turn. Depending on the deck, you may want to have most of your cards within a certain mana-cost range. The goal is to have most of your spells cost between three and five mana, and not too many cards with higher mana cost.

The idea of the mana curve serves to put you in the game from turn one. Nearly everyone hates it when they have to wait several turns before they can begin playing anything. Ideally, you want to be able to play one spell each turn from turn one, until you are able to play your most potent spells.

Even if your deck wants to win in some big way by playing an Akroma, Angel of Wrath late game, you have to have some means of protecting yourself until you can play her, which is why your deck needs to fit to a curve.

The curve of your deck depends on what you are playing—aggro, control, or combo. While there aren’t any specific rules to achieving the best mana curve, typically you want to have enough one cost spells to get in the game early and a few good two-drop spells for some early offense or defense, like Silver Knight or Counterspell. The rest is up to you and your deck.

Aggro decks tend to have lower curves, because they want to get out as many creatures as early as possible. Many of them cost between one and
three mana for a weenie deck, and between two and five for more midrange aggro decks.

[Midrange decks work slightly slower than weenie decks, stalling out for a few turns, attempting to win in the late game.]

Control decks have low to middle and higher curves, filling their lower mana slots with cheaper control, and then including higher-costing spells that more greatly influence the direction of the game. Low cost spells tend to remove threats and deal with spells in control decks, and higher cost spells will tend to be the cards that you will use to win.

The strategy by which you win a game is also known as your win condition. Identifying your win condition remains an important part of deckbuilding, because if your deck has no win condition, you won’t win.

Competitive combo decks have various assortments of mana sources depending on how the deck wants to win. A lot of their mana sources are in the form of spells with low converted mana cost.

As a casual player, your deck is probably going to have a win condition based in higher cost spells. The goal of the curve of your combo deck should be to ramp into your win condition or have a variety of spells to protect it until its combo goes off.

While these are not surefire formulaic methods to building your deck to the curve, you can get a sense of how your deck should look when you play it out. If each time you play the deck you find yourself sitting for too many turns before playing anything, you may have a problem with your curve.
Examining and determining where your issues with mana come from are important to understanding how a good deck can be undone. The proper amount of lands in the deck is integral to the optimal functionality of your deck.

There are only two ways you can go awry with land distribution; too much or not enough. Mana flood and mana screw are the infamous titles given to these problems. Each of these issues have to do with improper land distribution, which may stem from a misunderstanding of what proper land distribution is.

Mana flooding is the consistent dilemma of drawing too many lands when you don’t need them. This is usually a result of including too many lands in relation to the mana cost of your spells. For instance, you will need fewer lands in your deck if the highest cost among your spells is three or four. Recommended amounts of lands in low-cost decks is between eighteen and twenty two lands because at a certain point you will no longer want to draw lands.

Good ways to prevent mana flood are to have an accurate land-to-nonland ratio for the type of deck you are building, or have ways to pull lands out of your deck. Some decks do this by using spells or lands that will “fetch” lands out of your deck.

Many competitive players use “fetch lands” like **Wooded Foothills** or **Polluted Delta** in order to include plenty of lands, yet reduce the overall land dependency of their decks, allowing the fetch lands to pull the mana-producing lands out of their library.
Proper mana distribution varies depending on the deck you are playing. As previously stated, aggro decks typically use between eighteen and twenty-two lands because most of their spell costs are going to be under five mana.

Control decks, on the other hand, not only need their mana for their controlling spells, but also in order to play their big spells later in the game. Control decks want to play a land each turn, so they want to have enough lands in their deck to ensure this.

Usually, control decks have between twenty-four and twenty-eight lands. In most decks this would inevitably create mana-flooding issues, but effective control decks have ways of drawing cards that allow them to spend more deck space on lands. Since control decks may have high-costing spells in their deck, they will need more lands to be able to play them. Keep this in mind if you are building any deck with high-cost spells in it.

Some combo decks have lower amounts of lands in them because they have spells that produce mana for them, and drawing lands when you are trying to find the spells you need to win is obnoxious. Usually, combo decks have a low amount of lands; between fourteen and nineteen. Many casual players play decks that are combo-control, like a mill deck. In this situation, you will need enough lands for your control-part of the deck. Likewise, make adjustments where they are necessary if your combo deck shares its base with another type of deck.

As identified earlier, mana screw is another mana issue that players may encounter. As opposed to mana flood, mana screw is the issue of having too few lands in your deck. Rather than reiterating the aforementioned information
about proper land distribution, allow me to explain how mana screw may be affecting your deck even with the right amount of lands.

While mana screw can be a result of insufficient amounts of lands, it can also be a reflection of poor curve mechanics as well. As stated earlier, if you include too high of mana cost spells in your deck, you can find that you are sitting out of a game just because you can’t draw that fourth land you need to play the spells in your hand.

Ensure that you don’t have too many spells of the same converted mana cost, as this can “clog” your turns, allowing you to play only one spell a turn, especially with higher costing spells.

Additional problems can be mana screwing you if you are simply not shuffling your deck well enough. When you play, if you scoop up all of your cards that you were just playing with, many of your lands will remain next to each other in the deck, because you piled them together when you played. Proper and thorough shuffling can help this simple problem. Pile shuffling is recommended for adequate shuffling.

To pile shuffle, separate your cards into seven piles, then randomly place cards in each of those piles until you have exhausted your library. You may either restack and repeat this process or shuffle the piles together. This helps to break up clumped land cards in your deck.
Mana fixing is an important aspect of building a multicolored deck. Even decks with only two colors can have issues with mana if you don’t include proper methods of fixing your manabase.

If, for example, you were to make a blue-black mill deck, it would not be the best approach to stick twelve island and twelve swamp in the deck and expect your lands to come to you when needed. In this situation, you might notice that you are not getting the right lands at the right times.

One thing to think about is the amount of spells of each color that you have in your deck. You might have a blue/black deck, but your spells might not be evenly divided between the two colors. Additionally, look at the colored mana requirements of your spells. Some of your spells might demand more black mana than blue, or vice versa.
Let us say, for example, that your deck utilizes both of these cards. A cursory glance will suggest that your deck relies more heavily on black than it does on blue. Because *Reiver Demon* requires BBBB in its cost, you will need to dependably draw enough swamps to play the card. Mana leak, on the other hand, requires only one dedicated mana in its cost. Therefore, you might adjust the amount of black sources of mana to be higher than the blue sources. Instead of twelve swamp and twelve island you might want to balance it so that you are more likely to draw black sources of mana. In this situation, it might be wiser to have 16 swamp and eight island.

This is only an observation of two of the cards in your deck. Conversely, the opposite could be true. You could have many more cards that require multiple blue mana and most of your other black spells might only have one required black mana in their costs. Therefore, it is important to look at the number of dedicated mana symbols for each color in your deck.

Using lands that produce two types of mana can reduce inconsistencies that you might have with your manabase. There are a variety of lands that can produce two or more types of mana, the most powerful being the original Mana broken mana?

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**Reiver Demon**

Creature–Demon  4BBBB

When Reiver Demon comes into play, if you played it from your hand, destroy all nonartifact, nonblack creatures. They can’t be regenerated.

6/6

**Mana Leak**

Instant  1U

Counter target spell unless its controller pays 3.
“dual lands” from the earliest sets of Magic. These lands counted as two land types, and produced both of those colors. These cards, Taiga, Bayou, etc. are coveted, powerful cards within the game of Magic, and they can help streamline manabases and make multicolored decks more feasible.

However, those lands are quite costly, especially compared to the cheap alternatives that are slower, but just as effective for casual players. Cards like Tainted Isle and Salt Marsh will do nearly the same thing with a cost. Tainted Isle produces both blue and black, but requires that you already possess a swamp. In a deck that is mostly swamp with a few island, Tainted Isle might be a good inclusion to help you get both land types.

When you include lands that can produce two colors, it is as if you are including two lands of each type that that land could produce. Including four Salt Marsh in your blue black deck makes it as if you had sixteen Swamp and sixteen Island because the duality of Salt Marsh serves to provide you with both types of mana.

Here are some tables that can give you an idea of how a deck can become more capable of playing spells by having flexible manabases.
Above is an example of a deck that shows a heavier requirement of black mana than blue, yet has an equal proportion of blue sources to black sources. An adjustment to the manabase would enhance its overall performance. Let’s see what we can do about this.

A better manabase might look like this:

- 6 Island – U
- 4 Underground River – U/B
- 4 Salt Marsh – U/B
- 10 Swamp – B
- 4 Counterspell - UU
- 4 Boomerang - UU
- 4 Mana Leak - (1)U
- 4 Brainstorm - U
- 2 Reiver Demon (4)BBBB
- 2 Temporal Extortion - BBBB
- 2 Diabolic Tutor (2)BB
- 4 Phyrexian Arena - (1)BB
- 2 Hymn to Tourach - BB
- 4 Terror - (1)B
- 4 Duress - B
To fix the manabase, I took out a total of six lands and replaced them with other lands that could produce two types. However, I did not remove an equal amount of Swamps and Islands. Since the deck has a heavier black requirement, we still want to keep as many swamps as we can. By taking out the islands, we retain more dedicated black sources while at the same time increasing the amount of lands that can produce black mana.

Now there are 14 lands capable of producing blue, and 18 lands capable of producing black, which is much more flexible than the previous 12 and 12.

What if you have more than just two colors? It does require more careful deliberation, but basically the same process applies. You must examine how many of each color is represented in the deck and how many dedicated mana symbols are required by those colors.

When you want to play multiple colors in your deck, it is essential to play lands that produce multiple colors. This is where the pain lands you might invest in will find a good amount of use. Because they easily produce two different colors, you can put several in your deck for various color combinations.

Their presence, in addition to your basic lands, will help streamline your manabase and allow you to play the spells you have in your hand more consistently, rather than sit around, waiting to draw that second mountain you need to play your spells.
Sure, you might find it a slight inconvenience to take damage for making mana, but you have to consider that you could be taking quite a bit more damage from your opponent because you are reluctant to take one damage from a land. The drawback of the damage is outweighed by the benefit of flexible mana.

A good thing to realize when building multiple colored decks is that there is only so much you can do with basic lands. Sure, for the most part you may be able to play two color decks with consistency, but when you add more and more colors to your deck, it becomes more difficult to achieve consistent success with your deck.
If you have cards that require only one dedicated mana, it is easier to include them in multi-color decks because once you get one of the lands you need you will be able to play it. A good example is *Mana Leak* over *Counterspell*. You only need one Island or blue source to play *Mana Leak*, but *Counterspell* is more restrictive by its requirement of two blue mana.

There are spells out there that you might want to put into your three-color deck that require two or three dedicated mana. Therefore, you will need to reliably draw three sources of one type in order to play that spell.

Putting in nonbasic lands that produce more than one color greatly improves your odds of being able to play these spells. Fortunately, there are plenty of nonbasic lands for the casual player to use that can help them support multi-color decks.

Nonbasic lands that can produce multiple types of mana make it easier for decks to produce the mana they need, when they need it. As a casual player, find and include nonbasic lands in your decks to improve their overall effectiveness.

**Mana recap**

Mana issues can ultimately be the undoing of a decent deck. When playing a deck that seems to be having issues, make sure:

- The mana curve is well balanced
- There are a proper amount of lands within the deck, not too many or too few
- The lands support the colors and match the demands of dedicated mana symbols of colored spells
To the casual player, creatures are a nearly inextricable asset to every deck built. It is indeed difficult, though not impossible, to build a deck that includes no creatures. Even decks that rely on dealing damage directly to their opponent’s life total find it difficult to rely solely on noncreature spells for victory. Creatures represent offense, defense, and versatility for a deck, a way to overwhelm your opponent and achieve victory.

There are many creatures in the game of Magic, ranging from zero power creatures like Wall of Wood to gigantic, indestructible creatures like Darksteel Colossus. Creature inclusion is a natural stage for most decks; as noted before, very few decks can operate without any creatures.
The variety of creatures that exist within the game allows for the casual deckbuilder to choose from a plethora of useful creatures, each of which are suitable options to include within a particular deck.

Proper selection of creatures is just as essential as any other factor of deck-building. Improper selection of creatures is just as likely to be the downfall of a deck as improper curve balance or bad land distribution.

Choosing creatures is not always the easiest of tasks. Even when you have several creatures selected, it is sometimes hard to fit in the right ones in the deck. You might have several creatures that you wish to include, but not all of them will fit in a focused, sixty card deck. How do you know which ones to keep and which ones to set aside?

First of all, consider the niche or function that the card is serving in the deck. Is it included because it is the best card for its cost, or is it simply because of its ability or abilities that it possesses? If the latter is true, ensure that it is the only card that possesses those abilities. If another card exists that has the same abilities, compare the two and see which might fit better.

There are plenty of creatures that are big, and many that have unique and interesting abilities, but these creatures are not always the best creature for the deck you want to build. If you have a focus to your deck, the creatures you include should follow along with that focus.

Using a good creature in a deck is important, but using the best creature is something that will make the deck even more successful.
It is claimed that Spike players look for cards to include in their deck that are both aggressively priced and powerful. This is not to say that casual players should ignore those powerful cards. On the contrary, if competitive players find a creature useful, it is likely that it would be a good creature for all players.

These creatures are powerful for a reason and should therefore be considered in your deck. *Silver Knight* is a potent 2/2 for most white weenie decks. Likewise, there are many other powerful cards at various mana costs. These are creatures that you might benefit from including in your deck.
What makes one card better than another with a similar ability? Mogg Fanatic versus Shock Troops. Which one is the better card? Most often it is the Mogg Fanatic. This is because of a variety of things, including its mana cost of one and instant-speed ability. Shock Troops are higher in mana cost for not much better of a body or ability.

At higher mana costs, red spells want to be doing more than 2 damage. The Fanatic can squeak out some damage before your opponent lays a creature that you can’t get around, where its sacrifice ability comes in handy. However, by turn four, it is unlikely that your Shock Troops will be able to get around any of your opponent’s creatures, and they simply become an overpriced burn spell.

Some cards are ultimately going to be better choices than others, so looking for those cards is key to successful creature inclusion.

Big creatures are important in some decks, providing a large force that the opponent will likely have difficulty dealing with. Especially when that large-bodied creature has flying, trample, regenerate, or any other obnoxious ability that makes it a force to be reckoned with.

You might have the opportunity to include gigantic creatures in your deck, but for the most part, you will want to restrict the amount of high-costing creatures in your deck, despite their power level. This goes back to the idea of the “curve” of your deck.
It is a good idea to have a few high-cost, high powered creatures in your deck if it can afford it, and as a casual player, it is unlikely that much harm will come from including it. Large creatures, especially those with powerful abilities, are almost always a threat to your opponent.

When is it a good idea to include powerful, high-cost creatures, and when is it a good idea to keep those cards out, in favor of more well-rounded, versatile cards? It is difficult to identify exactly when, but the focus of your deck should tell you which cards belong. If your deck is trying to win as fast as possible, including an eight-cost house-of-a-creature might be a waste of a spell in your deck. Depending on the situation, a smaller, more affordable creature might take the place of that huge creature you want to include.

Which card is better, *Serra Avenger* or *Akroma, Angel of Wrath*? At first glance you would immediately guess *Akroma*, and it is true, if both are on the table, *Akroma* would win the fist fight. However, in the time it takes you to get up the amount of mana you need to play *Akroma*, your opponent might have beaten the life out of you with an army of *Serra Avenger* and other smaller creatures. This is where other aspects of deckbuilding play into the proper selection of creatures.

Sure, *Thorn Elemental* may be big, *Akroma, Angel of Wrath* or *Phage, the Untouchable* may be powerful, and sometimes they can be considered the best. But for the most part, smaller, more affordable creatures will bring you to victory.
There are many creatures that can serve the purpose of being a 2/2 or 3/2 body, but their inclusion in your deck is for a far more significant purpose. In many instances, you might include creatures because they possess the ability to destroy artifacts or enchantments, or remove cards or creatures from the game. This dual role that they can play is a powerful tool to remember when building your deck.

There are several different types of abilities that creatures may possess that allow them to serve as a creature as well as an ability that might otherwise be filled by a different card type. These abilities may be activated or triggered abilities that can be initialized by the creature’s controller, or passive, global abilities that alter the state of play.

For instance, the activated ability of a creature like *Viridian Zealot* gives you the versatility of being a creature and an effect.

At first glance, this card does not seem like it would be any good. If you want to play this card and use its ability immediately, it has to be your turn and you have to have four mana to use it. However, this card’s intention is not to sit in your hand until you need to use it; it is a creature, and should be in play, attacking or defending! The ability gives it versatility against a variety of threats without sacrificing space in your deck for creatures.

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**Viridian Zealot**

Creature–Elf Warrior  GG

1G, Sacrifice Viridian Zealot: Destroy target artifact or enchantment.
This creature is a *Naturalize* built into a 2/1 beatstick. Say your playgroup has a lot of annoying enchantments or artifacts floating around in their decks. You might be tempted to put those *Naturalize* in your deck in order to deal with those cards. However, when your opponents aren’t playing those artifacts or enchantments, *Naturalize* will sit useless in your hand. Not so with creatures like *Viridian Zealot*, which will always be at least a 2/1 creature.

Creatures with “comes into play” abilities are also highly used cards as well; nearly every set has a few creatures that have been coveted for a powerful “comes into play” ability of a creature. *Flametongue Kavu*, *Viridian Shaman*, *Shriekmaw* and *Avalanche Riders* are all examples of creatures with “comes into play” abilities that made them powerful cards because of their role as a spell and as a creature. Their dual role fills two slots for one card, creating more space within the deck for other spells.
Creatures with activated abilities like *Viridian Zealot* or triggered abilities like *Shriekmaw* are utility creatures that serve their role not only as a creature, but also as a means of dealing with the threats of your opponent’s deck. These creatures serve the purpose of removal or control, reducing or even negating the impact of your opponent’s spells.

Other creatures have passive abilities that make them act like an enchantment, a 2/2 body or larger with a passive ability tacked on. These creatures are often included to neutralize threats before they even exist, or to hinder your opponent in some way.

Hindering your opponent can be more effective than destroying their creatures or countering their spells. Some of these creatures can essentially neuter an opponent’s deck. Why include removal spells when you can just shut down a deck entirely?

*Stoic Angel* is a 3/4 creature with *Flying* and *Vigilance* that can ruin the day of an aggro-based deck that relies on many small creatures to overwhelm the opponent. Its ability prevents players from untapping more than one creature each turn. It shuts down the opponent’s ability to swarm and gain board position in that way.
Why use *Disenchant* when you can use *Kataki, War’s Wage*? Your opponent will have to pay (1) for each artifact they control at the beginning of each upkeep, slowing them down if they have only a few artifacts, but if they have a dedicated artifact deck, they will be completely shut down.

If your opponent is playing some crazy five-color deck that utilizes tons of nonbasic lands in order to play their spells, *Magus of the Moon* can ensure that they don’t get a chance to. Like *Blood Moon*, *Magus of the Moon* turns all nonbasic lands into mountains. As a result, the only spells a multicolored deck will be able to play are those that only cost red mana or those they can play with any basic lands they are using.

As with the example of *Viridian Zealot*, these creatures act as another spell, but possess a body that can deal damage to an opponent. Since most decks win through creature damage, this is ideal. Why use an enchantment or artifact when you can use a creature that will do the same thing and smack your opponent for some damage?

The drawback of using these creatures in the place of its noncreature counterpart is that these creatures are far more vulnerable, especially in casual settings, where your opponents are likely going to be prepared for creatures and as a result, have plenty of creature removal at their disposal. While these creatures are going to fill your deck with more threats, the abilities will be less consistent if your opponent has enough removal.
A quick mention ought to be made for Legendary creatures. These creatures are often powerful and have game-changing abilities that are balanced by the restriction of only one in play at a time.

*Akroma, Angel of Wrath*, is an example of a creature with huge amounts of power, but is balanced both by her mana cost and her Legendary creature tag. Referenced earlier *Kataki, War’s Wage* has an ability that shuts down artifact decks, his powerful ability is suppressed by the Legend Rule.
For those of you unfamiliar with how the Legend Rule works, here is a brief summary: If there are two legendary permanents in play that have the exact same name, both are put into their owner’s graveyard. If two *Mirri, Cat Warrior* are in play, they will both be put into their owner’s graveyard immediately. If, however, one player controls *Mirri, Cat Warrior*, and another player plays *Mirri the Cursed*, neither dies, because they do not have the same name.

With the Legend Rule, you may only control one of those Legendary permanents at a time, meaning that if you are to draw a second copy of that Legendary permanent, you will be unable to play it when you draw it, making it a dead card. If your opponent kills the Legendary creature in play you will be able to play the replacement, but it will otherwise sit in your hand.

This is something players ought to consider carefully. Evaluate whether or not you will need four copies of a Legendary creature when including those creatures within your decks. Do you want to dedicate four spots in your deck to *Rafiq of the Many*?

This is something that will depend on your playgroup as to whether or not you will desire to include four copies of any given Legendary creature. High amounts of creature removal might suggest that you should have plenty of backup copies of the Legendary creature you decide to use in your deck.

Inclusion of these cards will also depend on how much your deck relies on that Legendary creature and whether or not you need to see it in your opening hand. More copies of it means a higher probability of drawing it.
In the section detailing aggro decks, aggro creatures have been identified as creatures that are low cost, between one to three mana, and have a relatively high payout for their low costs.

*Savanna Lions* is the original weenie aggro creature, two power for one mana and is a great first turn for many aggro players. Absent of any ability, its power comes from the fact that it can take away 10% of your opponent’s starting life total each turn it gets through.

Climbing the ladder of mana-cost, good aggro creatures need to increase their power to be efficient. *Tarmogoyf* is the competitive player’s preference when it comes to two cost creatures. Due to its prevalence within many formats, it is difficult to disagree with its potency. However, outside of the proper deck, a *Tarmogoyf* is sometimes no better than a *Grizzly Bears*.

A good rule of thumb for aggro creatures is that they should have a relatively high power for their cost. *Wooly Thoctar* and *Doran, the Siege Tower* are contemporary examples of a high powered creatures that only cost three mana.

Good abilities possessed by aggro creatures are things like first strike, trample, haste, and double strike. These abilities allow them to get damage through to the opponent with relative ease.

Another approach to aggro is through tribal interactions like *Elves* or *Kithkin*. Swarming your opponent with many creatures can end the game just as quickly as hammering through with just one big creature.
Midrange aggro decks take a different approach to aggro. Midrange decks will have a wide variety of creatures and surpass the usual three mana cap on spells. By using higher mana creatures, these decks may include threats in the form of creatures like *Spiritmonger*.

Midrange aggro decks use mana acceleration in order to accompany these bigger threats in their decks. In fact, mana acceleration creatures like *Birds of Paradise* or *Llanowar Elves* are good creatures to include in midrange aggro decks because it will allow you to play big threats earlier.
Creatures in control decks will vary based entirely on the type of control that you are playing. Many times the creatures will be highly utility based, involving many “comes into play” creatures that help the player stabilize.

Maintaining your control over the game is an important goal for the control player, so creatures must assist in this through their abilities. Creature inclusion is usually to do more than just attack; most of the time they are serving the dual purpose of being both a spell and a creature.

*Spellstutter Sprite* and *Venser, Shaper Savant* are examples of high utility control creatures. Combined with other cards in a control deck, these creatures can become reusable control spells.
The synergy between the land and these creatures can create a lock for opponents, consistently countering spells or returning creatures to your opponent’s hand.

To control the game, you need to stay in the game. Creatures need to be able to keep your opponents from knocking you down past your last life point. For this reason, many creatures in control decks need to help revitalize you.

Creatures with lifelink help to do this, each point of damage that they do increases your life total, making it much more difficult for your opponents to keep your life total down. Creatures that gain you life when they come into play or while they are in play are also helpful.

For some players, walls are a good method of defense. They frequently have high toughness, which can be very hard for some aggro decks to punch through.

When it comes to winning, however, it is best to have a finisher with some form of evasion, usually in the form of flying or unblockable creatures. Flying is a surprisingly unused mechanic by many players, and even if they do, the control player should have a means of removing those obstacles.

The finisher does not need to be a powerhouse of damage, but it helps win the game faster. Oona, Queen of the Fae is an example of a large creature that can win the game for you after the dust has settled. Additionally, she provides for additional points of damage by milling your opponent and creating new bodies in doing so.
Creatures combo

There are not very many creatures that might fit into the idea of a combo deck, because often the combo deck seeks to find all of its pieces and then go off, which very infrequently has creatures in it. However, there are creatures that can serve as mana acceleration.

*Tinder Wall, Wild Cantor,* and *Skirk Prospector* have the capabilities of producing mana from themselves. With *Wild Cantor* and *Skirk Prospector* you are only getting back the amount of mana you invested in them, but *Shirk Prospector* can also turn any of your goblins into mana.

Combo decks that rely on creatures require mana acceleration. There have been combo decks that rely on the interaction between *Nettle Sentinel, Heritage Druid,* and *Glimpse of Nature* that produced a lot of mana and allowed the deck’s controller to draw a lot of cards.

Combo decks tend to rely less on creatures and more on spells that allow them to generate infinites. Infinite mana, damage, mill, or any other crazy way they want to win. Sometimes this involves creatures, and sometimes this doesn’t.

Of course, half the fun of building combo decks is to find some interaction that causes instant victory on your own. The means of getting there is up to each deck builder, and the other half of the fun is in trying to make it work.
Creatures recap

Aggro decks want cheap, powerful creatures to control the game quickly, before the opponent has time to recover.

Midrange decks may play bigger creatures, but will require mana acceleration to help get them out faster.

Control decks want versatile creatures that help control the motion of the game and a win condition in the form of evasive creatures.

Utility creatures act in the same way that other spells would; countering spells, gaining life, etc.

Combo decks infrequently rely on creatures to win, so their inclusion is entirely up to the combo player.
Okay, so your deck needs more than lands and creatures, doesn’t it? Unless you are taking some bizarre purist approach to the game, you are going to need more than those two card types in order to establish your own offense and punch through your opponent’s defense to get at their life total. The next step in deckbuilding is to decide what needs to be included to carry out the goals of the deck.

There are several things to consider outside of creatures and lands. Each deck type will need certain types of noncreature, nonland (hereafter referred to as NCNL) cards to enhance its performance. These cards will vary depending on the type of deck, the goal of the deck, and they will even vary from person to person as they try to approach their games differently.

This is how various forms of the same deck can exist- people prefer some cards over others. Depending on the direction that your deck is going, aggro, control, or combo, you will need to include spells that will support those deck types.
This is an important section of card inclusion in any deck because without it, a good deck can lose against one card that it couldn’t deal with. For instance, an elf deck devoid of enchantment removal will suddenly find itself shut down by a Teferi’s Moat set to green.

Removal is just as important to a deck as creatures or lands, because removal is what is going to let your creatures reduce your opponent’s life total to zero. Sure, you can lose your creatures in battle against your opponent’s creatures, or you could use spells that destroy, remove, shuffle, or steal your opponent’s creatures.

Removal to an aggro player will be the spells that deal with things your creatures can’t. For instance, you play against someone who drops down a Stuffy Doll coupled with a Pariah, and suddenly your aggro deck can’t do a thing to hurt your opponent.

**Stuffy Doll**

Artifact Creature-Construct  5

As Stuffy Doll comes into play, choose a player.
Stuffy Doll is indestructible.
Whenever damage is dealt to Stuffy Doll, it deals that much damage to the chosen player.
Tap: Stuffy Doll deals 1 damage to itself.

**Pariah**

Enchantment–Aura  2W

Enchant creature.
All damage that would be dealt to you is dealt to enchanted creature instead.
Without some form of removal, your aggro deck is locked out of its own game. Powerful cards exist to remove troublesome indestructible creatures, such as *Swords to Plowshares* and *Path to Exile*, which will not only get rid of the *Stuffy Doll*, but remove it from the game as well. Inclusion of cards like these are essential for aggro decks that find themselves coming up against difficult creatures, or creatures that are far more powerful than their own.

Depending on your gameplay environment and your own deck, the amount of removal that you should have will vary. The type of deck that you are using will also determine how many spells of each type you will need. Decks with countermagic might have fewer kill spells, but other decks will need between four to eight sources of removal. This also ought to be adjusted to your meta, because with different decktypes, different spells will be required.

Removal is not restricted to creatures only; many times noncreature spells will be a hassle as well. For this reason it is important to factor in removal for noncreature permanents. This may be through dual-role creatures or other spells. Again, adjusting your deck to fit the decks you commonly play against is key to determining what sorts of removal are needed.
Good removal spells to consider when building your deck:

- Swords to Plowshares
- Path to Exile
- Disenchant
- Oblivion Ring
- Wrath of God
- Naturalize
- Krosan Grip
- Desert Twister
- Tranquility
- Unsummon
- Boomerang
- Pongify
- Ovinize
- Terminate
- Mortify
- Putrefy
- Vindicate
- Ancient Grudge
- Smash to Smithereens
- Lightning Bolt
- Pyroclasm
- Terror
- Dark Banishing
- Smother
- Ghastly Demise
- Damnation
There is a huge distinction between these two terms; one refers to the process of getting cards, and the other refers to actually having cards.

Where are your cards coming from when you play Magic? From your draw step, each turn is a likely response, but for some decks, that is not enough. Drawing and having cards is an important part of the game, otherwise, where would your creatures and spells come from?

Both draw power and card advantage are important, but not every deck needs draw power. Some decks manage perfectly well with their one draw per turn. Draw power does enhance the speed of most decks and having an extra spell in hand each turn will definitely help you punch through your opponent’s defense or handle his spells.

Draw power is an important part of building a control deck. Control decks need a lot of parts to make the entire thing work which is why they run fewer creatures; they need to fill the other slots with cards for removal, control, and draw power.

Draw power allows control decks to get the cards they need when they need them so that they can handle their opponents’ spells.

Draw power can be in the form of cards like Howling Mine, Jace, or Accumulated Knowledge, but they can also come from creatures like Shadowmage Infiltrator, or Ninja of the Deep Hours. The point of draw power is to ensure that you have the cards in hand that will allow you to keep control of the game.
Draw power is good, but consistent draw power is even better. If you have some method of continually drawing cards each turn, or ensuring that you will only draw good cards when you draw them, you will be much better off than drawing an unknown card each turn.

Draw spells imprinted upon Isochron Scepter that allow you to draw cards can enhance the performance of a deck. Additionally, cards like Sensei’s Divining Top will assist you in knowing what to expect when you draw your card.

Cards like Magus of the Future also give you draw power in a way, because they reveal to you the top card of your library and allow you to play it as though it were in your hand. Control players need to think about where to get their cards from in order to stay ahead of the game.

Draw power comes in different ways for each color. For some colors, there are very few options. Some cards have the added bonus of drawing a card as part of their effect. These cards are called a cantrip, which simply means that they get you a card as part of their other effect.

Cantrips are a more common way to draw cards outside of blue, though each color usually has some commonly used ways to draw cards.

Black is a contender for blue when it comes to drawing cards. Though its means are much more self-sacrificing, black has nearly as many methods of getting cards.

Cards like Phyrexian Arena or Dark Confidant are ways in which many decks utilize draw power. Additionally, cards like Skeletal Scrying and Night’s Whisper are also powerful draw spells, though they also rely on the loss of one’s own life total.
Green and red are far less powerful colors when it comes to drawing cards, though more recently green has been given some card drawing vitality.

Harmonize is regarded as the most powerful green draw spell.

Red has cards like Browbeat and Goblin Lore, each of which has a significant drawback. For instance, the opponent could simply take the five damage from Browbeat, and Goblin Lore could make you discard the cards that you wanted.

White is the weakest color when it comes to draw power, having literally no cards that simply beget more cards. Nearly all of white’s draw power lies in cantrips and its own draw step.
Draw power is the thing that then leads to card advantage, though card advantage can come in different ways. Card advantage is a scenario in which one player has a distinct advantage based on the amount of cards they possess in hand.

If we consider that a card in hand can be just as potent as a card on the table, then having a hand full of cards is a serious power imbalance. To explain how card advantage can greatly affect the direction of a game, imagine that one player has a hand full of cards and the other player has no cards in hand, but plenty of creatures on the board. The player with the hand full of cards then plays *Wrath of God*, wiping the playing field clean of creatures.

The player who previously had a good board position now finds his momentum stifled. Without cards in hand to recover with, the opponent is essentially limited to one spell a turn as he draws one card per turn. The other player can then instantly develop board control with the many cards in his hand and turn the game in his favor.

Cards in your hand are just as important as cards in play, especially when playing with people who are fond of using cards like *Wrath of God*. Against those players, keeping cards back is important, even if you aren’t winning as fast.

In the scenario above, the player was overextending, using up all of his resources in order to defeat the opponent as fast as he could.

When this happens, all the opponent has to do is clear the board, and the other player is suddenly helpless. Being aware of who you are playing against will help prevent overextension and keep the game in your favor.
So far, I’ve talked about a lot of ways to make your deck better. Lands, creatures, removal spells, and spells that get you more cards are all important to building decks, but are simply suggestions as to how to give your deck more chances for success. As a casual player, there are going to be times that you include “just for fun” cards.

While you will want some or all of the above-listed cards in order to enhance the overall success of your deck, a casual setting will allow you to rely less on those cards and include more space in your deck for fun cards. Additionally, using those cards can even act as a surprise for others in your playgroup—especially if they expect to see certain cards in your deck, prepare for those cards, and now have dead cards because you aren’t playing any artifacts for them to *Smash.*

While a *Dolmen Gate* (which prevents all damage to attacking creatures you control) is not an essential card in an aggro deck, it can certainly prove to be quite annoying for your opponents who expect to be able to block and kill your creatures. *Magic* is full of cards that were not intended to be included in competitive decks; some of them were made simply to be fun cards.

*Lifeline* is a perfect example of a card with “casual” written all over it. Included in the right control deck, the card can invert the usual expectation of “creatures that die stay dead”.

Fun factor may be a reason why a creature is included in a deck. The player might want to see what interactions a card might have within the play group. While it might not be directly related to how he intends to win, it might be fun to include it for the dynamic it can add to games.
In group settings, cards like *Teferi’s Puzzle Box* will certainly throw a wrench in the normal progress of a game, and can end up causing a lot of fun to be had.

As long as the majority of your deck is organized and well-balanced, a few cards included for fun here and there will not likely impede upon your deck’s ability to function. Having fun is an important aspect of being a casual player, and well-honed decks can provide fun gaming experiences.
Playing casually also allows players to use fun “broken” cards they would otherwise be unable to use in other formats. In some playgroups, Legacy banned cards like Yawgmoth’s Bargain are allowed (though often restricted to one copy only) and make games more interesting.

Allowing broken cards comes with drawbacks. Broken cards are coined as broken for a reason. No one likes playing against broken decks, so balancing the amount of “unbalanced” cards that players can use is important for group gaming.

Each playgroup should determine a set of rules for banned or restricted cards if they are to be included in their decks. This will not only make games more enjoyable, but provoke fewer arguments during games as well.
Deck building has no guaranteed method of making a deck work well under every circumstance. Part of the game is chance, which is turned more towards your favor by good deckbuilding.

However, deck creation has an aspect of your own play style inherent in it as well as observations and expectations of what you will come across playing with your friends or your play group. These expectations are what cause you to use certain removal spells, global destruction, or find ways to deal with problem cards your opponents use.

Deck evolution comes from the constantly shifting nexus that is a play group. New players bring new decks to the table and old players add new cards to their decks, both of which will change the way that all players have to think about the game.

For example, if Isaac usually plays decks that have a lot of artifacts, his friends will pack in a lot of anti-artifact spells in order to deal with his decks. However, if Isaac then builds two new decks, an aggro deck with no artifacts and a control deck and begins playing those more frequently, his friends will have to adjust their decks to be better suited to dealing with the new decks.

Therefore, the cards that they will likely remove are those that have no effect against these new decks, namely the artifact-removal cards. In their place they might put kill spells or creatures, depending on what new threats Isaac is bringing to the table with his decks. This is just one example of how decks evolve within a play group.
Now let’s say that a new set comes out with some powerful new blue spells and Blake picks up a playset of each of these new spells. By adding them to his deck and substituting out old cards, Blake’s deck has undergone deck evolution. His friends might then have to adjust their decks to be able to get around his new spells.

New spells come out very frequently which can render older cards that players were using obsolete. Substituting these cards for the old ones will make decks more threatening and players might consider changing their decks, and this is how Magic evolves.

Each of us will play our decks and modify them as we get new cards or pick up more expensive cards. Investment is also an aspect of deck evolution; one player might include some cards that suit the needs of a deck at the time, but change them once he can afford better cards.

Because of this concept of deck evolution, one’s deck is never actually done. You might play with a deck in its first form, only to realize its potential could be enhanced by the inclusion of other cards. You might have a “finished” deck for quite a few years until a new spell comes out that could be added to your deck to make it much more potent.

Keeping in mind the mentality of other players is important when building or modifying your deck. Playgroups are a constantly shifting nexus of individuals with unique play styles and habits.
Inclusion of cards to protect or enhance your deck against these players must be balanced with your opponents’ decks and play styles. Keep up with the changes to keep ahead of the game, but remember that at its core, casual magic is meant to be a fun time with friends.
Happy travels Planeswalker.
PART FOUR: extras
The Deck-List Check-List

This section is included to help streamline the process of building new decks.

_____ This deck has a central theme that I want to build around.

_____ This deck is focused primarily into one of the three sections of deck types; aggro, combo or control.

_____ I have set aside the proper amount of lands for the type of deck that this is, 18-22 for aggro, 24-28 for control, or enough to accommodate a combo deck ~15.

_____ If this deck is multicolor, I have identified the colors and support all colors, beginning with the most used color.

_____ I have included nonbasic lands to help streamline my manabase for a multicolor deck.

_____ I have selected creatures that I want to include in my deck, and they support the type of deck I am building.

_____ If playing aggro, the creatures are relatively powerful and low cost.

_____ If playing control, the creatures are versatile and have controlling abilities.

_____ If playing combo, the creatures are part of or help make the combo work.

_____ My creatures are affordable and can be played before I lose the game.

_____ I have selected noncreature spells that are focused towards the goal of my deck. Aggro: Rancor. Control: Counterspell. Combo: Dark Ritual.

_____ I have included creatures or spells that serve as removal and/or help my deck get around obstacles. Viridian Shaman, Oblivion Ring, etc.

_____ I have included cards that will help me get around other players’ decks within my play group.

_____ If my deck needs it, it has draw power or a way to get more cards.

_____ My spells are playable and my manabase supports them.

_____ My cards fit the mana curve for the type of deck, and are not all the same cost.

_____ There are 60 or close to 60 cards in this deck.

_____ I have tested my deck and it has shown consistency.
This deck is an ideal model of an aggressive deck in red and green. With its cheap creatures, pump spells and spells for direct damage, this deck is well equipped to start the game out quickly and reduce the opponent’s life total to a low number before they have a chance to respond.

The deck’s burn spells also double as removal in early situations against smaller creatures. The pump spells may also serve as removal as well – making the naturally small creatures large enough to trade with stronger creatures. Rancor serves as a way of giving creatures power as well as trample, which helps get damage past blockers.

Creatures like Keldon Marauders and Mogg Fanatic have the ability to hit the opponent for damage without even having to attack. Kird Ape can potentially be a 2/3 by the time it attacks on turn two, which makes it larger than the average creature that an opponent would be able to drop on turn one as a blocker. ScribSprites and Skarrgan Pit-Skulk have forms of evasion that allow them to get damage through to the opponent without being easily blocked.

r/g beats decklist: aggro

Creatures
4 x Keldon Marauders
4 x Mogg Fanatic
4 x Scrib Sprites
4 x Kird Ape
4 x Skarrgan Pit-Skulk
2 x Radha, Heir to Keld

Instant
4 x Lightning Bolt
4 x Brute Force
4 x Magma Jet

Enchantment
4 x Rancor
4 x Seal of Strength

Land
3 x Forest
5 x Mountain
4 x Stomping Ground
4 x Karplusan Forest
2 x Pendelhaven
Because there are more red spells in the deck than green, the manabase is more balanced toward red. Yet, there are still plenty of sources that allow the green spells to be played without a problem. Additionally, since the curve of the spells cap out at two, the deck only needs 18 lands and could probably survive on fewer.

One thing that this deck lacks is the inclusion of spells that destroy artifacts or enchantments, which it has no ability to deal with. Depending on the playgroup, this deck could easily adjust to those problems, since red and green each have the ability to destroy artifacts and enchantments.
This is a four color aggro deck that I built to exploit the ability of Kavu Predator, who gets +1/+1 counters every time an opponent gains life. Therefore, the deck utilizes many cards that force the opponent to gain life, which allows my Kavu to get very big, especially in multiplayer games.

The deck supports removal in the forms of Oblivion Ring, Duress, Swords to Plowshares and Fiery Justice. Duress provides hand control if I think my opponent might have any tricks that could kill my Kavu before I can make it huge, and the Oblivion Ring and Swords to Plowshares can get rid of any pesky creatures or other obstacles. Fiery Justice can kill lots of 1/1s that my opponent may have and makes the Kavu bigger as well.
Doran, the Siege Tower was included because he fit the colors and because he is a huge creature for 3 mana, and easily comes out turn 3. Gaddock Teeg helps prevent opponents from playing board sweepers like Wrath of God so that my Kavu Predator can stay on the board. Brion Stoutarm is a good creature as a 4/4 Lifelink for 4 mana, but he also helps the deck’s strategy by being able to hurl a large Kavu at an opponent to finish them off.

The cards Skyshroud Cutter and Wall of Shards both force the opponent to gain life, which in turn makes for a bigger Kavu Predator. The wall also becomes a huge obstacle when Doran is in play, discouraging attacks from my opponents.

The nonbasic lands support the wide range of color requirements for the deck, and Land Grant helps me find lands that I need. Sakura-Tribe Elder also helps the deck accelerate into more land earlier in the game, allowing me to play more spells in a turn.

The curve of this deck is low, capping out at 4 mana. Therefore, I can get away with playing fewer lands. This deck has only 18 lands and has many ways of getting lands into play. With such a low curve, the deck is set up to accelerate into a quick win, especially if I can get a Kavu out early with several Skyshroud Cutters in hand.
false cure decklist: combo/control

Creatures
3 x Magus of the Tabernacle
4 x Oriss, Samite Guardian
4 x Martyr of Sands
3 x Kami of False Hope

Sorcery
2 x Wrath of God
4 x Gerrard’s Verdict

Instant
3 x Beacon of Immortality
3 x False Cure
4 x Swords to Plowshares

Enchantment
3 x Oversold Cemetery
2 x Phyrexian Arena
3 x Ghostly Prison

Lands
1 x Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth
4 x Tainted Field
4 x Flagstones of Trokair
4 x Godless Shrine
2 x Caves of Koilos
3 x Plains
4 x Swamp

The goal of this deck is not to win as soon as possible with aggressive creatures. In fact, this deck does not intend to win through combat damage at all.

The win condition of this deck is to lock down the opponent’s ability to attack and use the False Cure and Beacon of Immortality combo to instantly reduce the opponent’s life total to zero, no matter their current life total.

The deck has much removal through cards like Wrath of God and Swords to Plowshares in order to get rid of creatures. It also has the ability to nullify the opponent’s ability to attack through the combination of Magus of the Tabernacle and Ghostly Prison. The synergy between Oversold Cemetery and Oriss, Samite Guardian, Martyr of Sands or Kami of False Hope provides the deck with several ways to prevent the opponent from gaining any ground.
Phyrexian Arena provides card draw and helps the deck filter through cards faster than the opponent, allowing the deck to find the cards it needs more quickly.

The curve of the deck is higher, and the win condition requires eight mana and two cards. Therefore, more lands are needed in order to get the required amount of mana to win.

Twenty-three lands is cutting it close – but it works consistently for the most part, and the draw power provided by Phyrexian Arena helps get both the spells and lands the deck needs.