

The Gluestick Mirror

Have you ever imagined adding flying to your favorite creature, or flashback to your favorite instant? Check out the Gluestick Mirror, where you get to do exactly that!



The Gluestick Mirror is a pick-up-and-play, whimsical Magic: the Gathering format where players permanently modify cards by gluing components onto them. Without any deckbuilding or drafting, players get straight to the fun of gluing keywords onto cards and playing the game. Permanent modifications to cards give it the feel of a legacy board game, and lead to sometimes overpowered and often hilarious cards designed by the collaborative efforts of different players over time. As the person building and maintaining your own Gluestick Mirror, you get the joy of looking through the bulk bin to find bits of old Magic cards that you can imagine cutting up and separating from their original context, ready to be glued onto a Grizzly Bear!

Components required to play:

- ~90 cards with 2 Crystal Grotto, ~35 basic lands, and ~55 nonlands
- 3 boxes of cut up components, organized by card type



Setup and how to play:

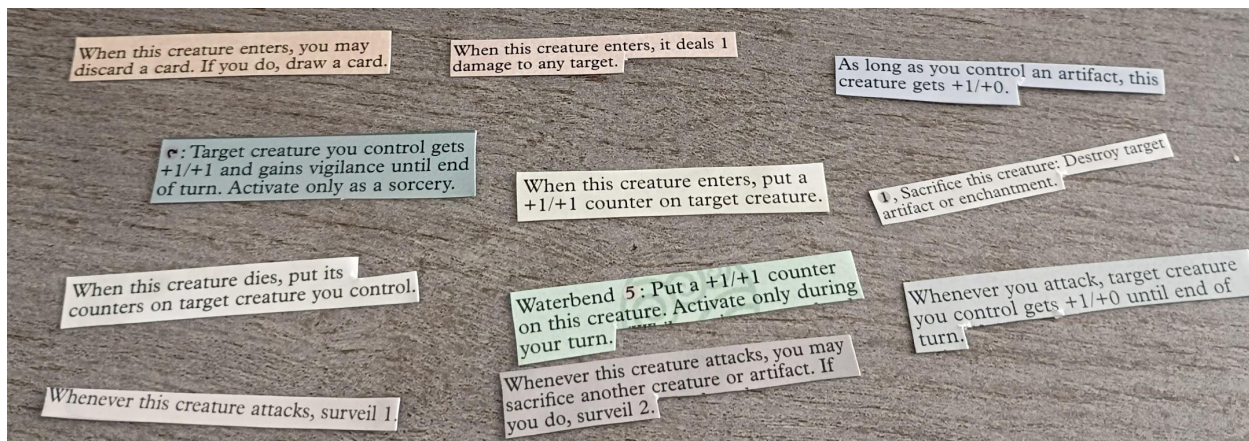
Choose a card type, then randomly select six cards of that type from the stack. Give three to each player, then give each player three components of that type. Each player permanently modifies one of their three cards with one of their three components, gluing it on (take it out of the sleeve!). Split the remaining cards into two decks, and draw starting hands of one Crystal Grotto, one freshly modified card, and five other random cards. Then play a regular game of Magic!

The one rule for gluing:

Don't cover any rules text (covering flavor text or art is fine).

Modification components

My version of the Gluestick Mirror is set up with just three boxes of card components, associated with the types creature, land, and instant/sorcery. In the past I've had artifacts and enchantments in the stack, but I found it tricky to balance ways to modify artifacts/enchantments with having enough ways to remove them, so I reduced down to just the essentials.



Example components from the creature box

The one design constraint I have across all component boxes (and base cards) is no token creation. Since the point is to be a quick pick-up-and-play experience, I just don't want players to have to deal with finding tokens. Ideally I would like to avoid any dice as well, but that just limited the possible card components too much so I allow for counters like +1/+1, stun, and finality.



The creature component box is the most straightforward to curate: most creature keywords like flying, menace, lifelink, and unearth are fun to put on cards and fun to play with. Something to watch out for is that deathtouch + first strike shuts down combat, so don't go overboard on these. Activated and triggered abilities are also fun to glue and fun to play with. In terms of raw power and toughness, "this creature enters with a +1/+1 counter" is reasonable, but anything beyond that tends warp the game. For example, "when this creature enters, put a +1/+1 counter on two target creatures" makes even the most modest draft common into a rate monster. I used to include basic landcycling but have shifted away from all shuffling mechanics. In particular, basic landcycling becomes approximately Demonic Tutor once enough of the basic lands have added adventures, which is not my personal taste.



For the land component box, my core principle is that lands in play should not do anything other than make mana. This cuts down massively on mental load for players, which is important because all of the cards are unfamiliar. Good components for the land box are tapping for an extra color ("T: Add A"), gain 1 life on entering the battlefield, and alternate modes from hand like adventures, omens, cycling, and channel. I avoid components that give a land two extra colors ("T: Add A or B") because it makes it onerous to determine what colors you can produce.



Finally, the instant/sorcery box is the trickiest to find good components for in the bulk bin. Good components include spell keywords like flashback and harmonize, small tack-ons like "scry/surveil 1/2" or "put a +1/+1 counter on target creature," and even some creature keywords like deathtouch, lifelink, and trample. There are a components that could go on creatures that I tend to put here, like madness, mayhem, sneak, and cost reduction effects like "this spell costs 1 less to cast on your turn" or "this spell costs 2 less to cast if it targets a tapped creature." It's easy to go overboard on raw power, so I avoid things like rebound and "draw a card." As an example, one of the cards I cut for being too strong was Shock with "draw a card."

Maintenance of the card stack

Speaking of removing cards, my process for adding and removing base cards from the stack is entirely drive by vibes. I don't have any hard and fast rules like "no adding a 4th component to a card" or "remove any card once it has 3 or more added components," I just remove a card when I think it's not fun anymore.



Some retired cards

In general, when constructing the stack in the first place, I like to start cards out at a very low power level, with mostly vanilla or French vanilla creatures and "French vanilla" spells like Shock, Divination, Plummet, etc. When they start out with almost no personality, there's more space for players to add things over time that give them personality. Ooh, I drew the Grizzly Bear that has Unearth, and someone else added First Strike since the last time I played!

A general phenomenon to watch out for is that adding components to cards that cost less mana is a bigger power increase. As a simple example, adding "This creature enters with a +1/+1 counter" is much stronger on a 1-mana creature than a 2-mana creature. Because of this, I've cut down on the 1-mana creatures heavily, and the ones that are left lean more defensive.



Why Crystal Grotto in the opening hand?

The primary reason is that I didn't want to worry about what colors I could include in components, so I needed to make sure players have access to all five colors. My first draft had a different land, Command Bridge, which is slower than Crystal Grotto to get going, but much more effectively fixes mana once in play. There was just one problem: approximately 100% of people I played against didn't bother reading Command Bridge and tried to play it tapped on the first turn. After being forced to correct people dozens of times over this, I realized I was fighting human nature and needed to change. Crystal Grotto may or may not be the perfect choice, but I've enjoyed how much Scry 1 does to reduce mulligans and early game variance, and the filtering ability is inefficient but does get regularly used.

Variants:

Most of these I haven't explored, but I bet there's someone out who would enjoy it!

- Share the deck rather than splitting it
- Allow covering up of rules text
- Include artifacts and enchantments
- Allow for token creation

Have fun gluing!
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