Lots of DM related data. Quite a mess. Worth a read, or at least a skim.

Shamelessly stolen from /tg/ and the general internet.
Check out these links too:

http://www.roleplayingtips.com/
http://www.thealexandrian.net/creations/creations.html
http://angrydm.com/2010/08/schrodinger-chekhov-samus/

http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?517294-The-Lazy-Man-s-Guide-to-Gamemastering
I like this one.

http://bensrpgpile.com/
http://dungeonsmaster.com
http://www.gnomestew.com/top-30-game-mastering-articles/

One of the players assumes the role of the Game Master (abbreviated as GM), while the other three players take on the roles of individual heroes, the main characters in the group's ongoing stories. These players are called hero players, and their characters are often referred to as adventurers, or player characters (abbreviated as PCs).

The GM helps establish the setting, manages monsters and supporting characters in the stories, and is the final authority on how the rules are applied during the game. The cast of characters managed by the GM are generally referred to as non-player characters (abbreviated as NPCs). The hero players work together to solve puzzles, defeat monsters, interact with NPCs, and otherwise resolve encounters and situations presented by the GM.

Over the course of a game session, the GM and hero players perform a variety of actions, roll dice, and track information for their respective characters. The hero players discuss options, form strategies, and explore the setting that the GM has described using their characters.

As the player characters participate in more stories and adventures, they gain experience. This experience allows the adventurers to improve their abilities and specialise in different aspects of their role the players find most interesting. As the player characters gain experience and develop their skills and abilities, the GM challenges them with more intricate stories and more dangerous encounters.

So how do you win a roleplaying game? One answer could be: the players win if everyone involved enjoys themselves and creates interesting stories and memories they'll share for years to come. The hero players can feel a sense of pride when they overcome the obstacles, solve the puzzles, and unravel the mysteries presented by the GM. The GM can enjoy the fact that the hero players rose to the challenge and had fun playing characters in his story.

This mutual enjoyment is the goal for both the Game Master and the hero players. The GM is not playing "against" the hero players. Both types of player work together to tell stories, resolve actions, and create a memorable experience.

Describing locations:
>3 Senses described
>3 Sentence max

Always play with 3 senses, 3 sentences.

Eg.
The room is dark, wooden walls and dirt floor. Broken furniture litters the room.
Smells like mould and dead bodies.
It's eerily quiet. Very, very quiet.

Big Battles

The thing is, you have to make your players a big part of it all.
Also, count on the relative power and assets.

Let's do it the d20 way (altho 3d6 is better).

Both armies are well supplied (no penal), well armed (no sabotage occurred), and are
matched on an even battlefield with even strength, even number of men.
Both these armies have a +0 modifier. The PCs also roll for their side, and they might add
something, your choice, but who cares, that's not the point here.

Average and subtract the bigger result from the smaller one and put that amount of
"damage" onto the losing side. When one side reaches 10, 20, or 100 damage, whenever
you're done with the battle, one army loses, gets routed or decimated.

Here's the fun catch, make the PCs the special ops characters that have to go around and
sabotage. This will put penalties on the enemy army, and it's especially important to
sabotage a stronger foe.

Eg. for one round of army combat, that lasts, lets say, a day, the enemy used Siege
Weapons (+6), Higher Ground(+2), and AoE Spells(+6). Your lines have low morale (-
2), low food (-2), and your castle is soon to be overrun.

This is where the PCs get into action, they can assassinate the mages, destroy the siege
weapons, or command an elite cavalry unit to seize the advantageous position. While on
mission, the PCs don't get to roll to help their side, but their side gets bonuses or lesser
penalties.

If shit goes against them, and they lose, handweave it so they're at the outskirts of the
battle, and can escape.

Generic first time storyteller tips to follow, in the hopes they bring you and your group enjoyment:

1. The secret to being an amazing storyteller is to trick your players into writing it for you. This basically just means that you take notes on what happens, and reuse small details from their actions in game and from their backstory. You need to set up a beginning, a few plot points and an end to your story arc, the rest of the details can be created by players and then used by you. When you bring back that goblin bartender they wronged in the first adventure they'll go "oh shit" because they remember him. It's early in the morning so I can't provide a more creative example, but you get the jist.

2. Seriously. Take notes. Taking lots of notes about random stuff is like 70% of good DMing.

3. Not enough notes. Take more notes.

4. Sometimes groups can be difficult to keep focused. There are a couple tricks that GMs share with teachers in order to keep a group's focus. The first is to know when to keep the conversation idle and when to snap them to attention. If your group loses focus on the game let them talk for a few minutes to get it out of their system. Be ready for a natural lull in the conversation to snap them back into immersion with a descriptive phrase. "So I said 'That's not your mother it's a zebra'" "hahaha good one Player number 3! So as you lie in the muck below the road, waiting to ambush the caravan you hear a low rumble from just beyond sight. It seems they have hired an ogre mercenary to guard them from brigands such as your selves! The moon is high in the sky and they will soon be upon you. What do you do?"

5. To aid with focus, encourage people to put a hand on their head when speaking out of character. Also you would be amazed how quickly the bribe of a cookie to the best roleplayer in each scene will snap people to attention.

6. Speaking of cookies, a few light snacks such as carrots and dip WILL go over well and keep attention on the table

The players MUST create their characters together, this is the most important step of any game. Get them together around the same table to flesh out their character ideas, and figure out what connects them to each other. Get a consensus out of them what kind of a game they want, and some idea what they want to do in game. Use this to create the first adventure (the players want a pirate game? the first session is about stealing a ship etc.)

What you need for GMing is character motivations. Ideally those mesh together, and it's easy to craft adventures using those as plot hooks. Accept whatever background information the players come up with, and weave that into your adventures, it's really easy in practice.

Also, chill. If something isn't working admit it and think of an alternative. You don't have to do snap judgements, if the players do something unexpected (and they will do), it's perfectly okay to call for a time-out to think of a good response.

Being ready to run the game

The DM needs to be prepared to run the game session. If you aren't ready, the game session isn't going to turn out well. Review the rules, particularly any special rules that might come up in the adventure. Know your adventure. If you're familiar with the plot and pacing of the adventure, it will run that much more smoothly. Plus, your knowledge of the adventure allows you to deal with the unexpected actions of the player characters — and the players will do things that you don't expect. That's part of the fun of the game.

Being ready also means being organized. Have your adventure materials and notes set up before the game session begins. Gather the miniatures you want to use ahead of time. Use sticky notes or bookmarks so you can easily find the sections of the rulebooks you know you'll need to refer to, especially the pages in the Monster Manual you might need to turn to for likely encounters.

The players expect you to be ready, so it's only a common courtesy that you don't disappoint them.

If you're ready, that's one thing that can take care of itself and you can focus on running a great game session.

Hosting chores

You need a place to play. Providing a place to play isn't the responsibility of the DM, though you might host the game session. Discuss this with the entire gaming group. Determine who has the space and the desire to host the game. Find out which of the possible locations are most convenient for the majority of the gaming group. You might

decide to rotate your regular game among a number of locations, sharing the responsibilities. You might discover that one location is going to work out best all the time and the host is fine with that.

A lot of what goes into this decision involves where you want to play. You have two options:

- You can play in a public place, such as a library or game store or coffee shop. This assumes that the staff and management of the place is okay with you playing there, you follow any rules the place sets up, and you keep the noise down so as not to disturb others using the public place.

- You can play in a private place, such as the home of one of the members of the gaming group. Certain rules and common courtesies do go along with playing in a friend's house. Follow them, and the host will continue to make space available. Break the rules or show disrespect for the location, and you'll probably need to find a new location for future game sessions.

Prior to the game, the host should make sure the play space is clean and that distractions are kept to a minimum. (Keeping pets and young children away from the gaming area is probably a good idea.) After the game, the entire gaming group should pitch in to clean up by throwing trash away, putting away dice and other gaming accouterments, storing any remaining snacks, and so on.

Setting a time limit

Set a time limit for the game session. This allows the other players to plan accordingly and gives you an idea of how much material you need to have prepared for the game. Bear in mind that the time limit is only a guideline. If you and the other players want to keep playing, you can adjust the time limit to everyone's satisfaction.

Bringing or chipping in for refreshments

The gaming group should reach a consensus before the game about how to handle food and drink. Will people eat lunch or dinner before coming to the game, or will a meal be part of the event? If the meal is part of the event, will everyone chip in for take-out or will everyone bring a dish to share? D&D is a group activity, so it shouldn't be the responsibility of a single group member (including the host or the DM) to take on the entire burden of feeding the group. Everyone chips in and one person buys for the group, everyone brings something to share, or everyone is expected to fend for themselves. Any choice is fine as long as the group knows what to expect at the game.

Make sure that the group agrees to food choices that work for everyone, or at least have options for all of the players. Some people don't like certain things, and others have special dietary needs or allergies. Try to take all of that into account as the group comes

up with a refreshment plan. And for long game sessions, the DM should plan breaks for food and drink so as not to disrupt the adventure.

Come up with a system that works best for your group and spreads the responsibility around. Then be courteous and live up to your end of the bargain.

Eliminating outside distractions

At the start of the game session, the DM needs to provide time for the players to socialize. Players like to catch up, discuss the news of the day, talk about favorite TV shows and movies, and generally shoot the breeze. D&D is as much about social interaction as slaying monsters, so this kind of activity is encouraged — as long as it's kept in its place. Fifteen minutes to a half hour of this, before the game starts, is fine, or perhaps over a meal (if one is part of your game session). When the DM calls for the game to begin, however, courtesy demands that all players turn their attention to the game.

The host can help by making sure that other distractions aren't easily accessible. The TV shouldn't be on when you're playing D&D. If the majority of the players want to watch the big game of the sport of their choice, maybe you should reschedule the game session. Likewise, keep the computer and console games out of sight, put the pets away, and send the younger children to their rooms to play their own games. (Better yet, hire a babysitter.)

Sometimes, a player just isn't in the mood for D&D. He or she might have had a rough day at the office, might not be feeling well, might have a ton of homework, or maybe there's something else he or she would rather be doing. Don't try to strong-arm a player into showing up and playing. If a player doesn't think he or she will have fun, encourage the player to take the night off from the game. The player can always jump back into things for your next game session.

Distractions are going to occur. Someone is going to tell a joke, relate a story, or otherwise disrupt the flow of the adventure. A little of that is okay and even fun. But stifle any distractions that derail the adventure and make it hard for the other players to enjoy the game. Etiquette and courtesy demand that players and DMs get their heads in the game for the game session so that everyone can have a good time.

Making sure everyone understands the in-game rules of conduct

These rules of conduct aren't revolutionary, but it's good to review them with your gaming group so that everyone knows what's expected of them when they come to play D&D:

- **It's the DM's show.** Players need to be kind to the DM and accept the DM's authority over the game. Likewise, when the DM makes a mistake (and it will happen), he or she should be willing to change a decision if that decision had negative repercussions for a player character.

- **Play fair.** Players shouldn't cheat, even to save their characters' lives. There are ways to deal with bad rolls (even ones that will result in a character's death) that don't force a player to stoop so low as to cheat.

- **Accentuate the positive.** Players should compliment the DM on a good game. Likewise, DMs should praise players when they have their characters do something especially clever or heroic or just plain fun.

- **Let the players play.** The DM needs to be kind to the players, treating them fairly and letting them make their own decisions. The DM shouldn't force the player characters to follow a specific path through the adventure, shouldn't punish them for being clever, and shouldn't intentionally and maliciously try to kill them.

- **It's the players' game, too.** The DM needs to treat players with respect and should ask them for their opinions on difficult rules interpretations.

- **Eliminate the negative.** The DM and the players should leave the real world behind when they play D&D, including any disagreements or lingering bad feelings that might otherwise color the way they play for a particular session. The DM and players should avoid distractions that make it hard for everyone to enjoy the game.

- **And most importantly, have fun!**

1. Learn How To Say Yes

The first rule is a fundamental one. Nothing grinds a game to a halt faster than a no ruling. Nothing frustrates a player more than being told their brilliant idea is no good. Nothing creates animosity towards the DM greater than a closed door policy on new ideas or rule interpretations. A no ruling at my normal game usually results in at least one player pulling out the PHB looking for clarification on the rule. It slows things down, it's a distraction, it's no fun. Please note this rule is learn how to say yes. There are instances when no is the correct call, but I urge to always consider the possibilities of yes before shutting an idea down. Unless the idea is clearly absurd, learn how to say yes. It will change your gaming life.

2. Learn How To Say Yes

Saying no is lazy. Learn to say yes, challenge yourself and your players to be more creative. You'll become a better DM, your adventures will appear more compelling and your players will come back each week craving more.

3. Learn When To Call An Encounter

Nothing is more boring that an war of attrition. In higher levels of 4e D&D, monsters can have a ridiculous amount of hit points. Once the tactical aspect of combat is over, the PCs have expended their daily and encounter powers, and there is only one NPC left to kill, call the fight. The exception to this rule is if there is a realistic threat and a strong possibility of a PC dying during what remains of the fight. If this threat is not present save yourself and your players the time and move on. Be warned, you are a DM and therefore a storyteller. Don't just end the encounter. Describe in detail how the PCs are able to defeat the last monster standing. Use the opportunity to build a sense of drama and accomplishment.

4. Use The Resources You Have Available

There are a lot of tools available for DMs. From mapping to encounter building, official to 3rd party. Feel free to use whatever works best for you. If a resource isn't readily available during play, then forget it. Don't decide mid-session that a graphical map displayed on the monitor stored in your garage would be a good idea, because it isn't one. Don't look for your player kill d20 that you lost this week because the PCs are cutting through your encounter like a hot knife through butter. Don't ask to borrow another players Monster Manual 2 because there is a more appropriate monster in that book than what you've selected.

5. Be Prepared

I learned this in Boy Scouts and it ties to the rule above. Use what you have on hand, what you've prepared and what you've committed to before your player's showed up. Wearing the DM hat is a lot of responsibility, the enjoyment of 4 or 5 other people rests in your hands. So be prepared. Don't fly from the seat of your pants, be prepared. Don't create maps on the spot, be prepared.

6. When In Doubt, See Rule # 1

If you don't know, say yes. If you don't care, say yes. If it makes sense, say yes. Nothing is worse than a DM who can't make a decision on a ruling. If you find yourself in this position say yes. Your player's will love you for it.

7. Let The Dice Fall Where They May

Dice are the random element of D&D. They can make exciting moments heroic and create disasters out of innocent transactions. As a DM you may feel the need to adjust the results of some dice. Some might call this creative cheating on the part of the DM. The final call is up to you, but I'm an advocate of letting the dice fall where they may.

8. If You Aren't Enjoying Things Stop

I've ended more than one campaign early because it just didn't work out the way I intended or feedback from players indicated that there was a lack of interest in the story I'd developed for the campaign. That's ok. Best to stop early and abruptly than torture everyone for months. If you find the role of the DM to be too much work, admit it to yourself and get out. If you aren't having fun doing it, stop.

Make Great Encounters

-Good Location

    -Change Weather often (rainy, dusty, heat, perfect…)
    -Change Lighting often (Dusk, Midnight, Morning, Midday…)
    -Change Ground often (Rubble, Forrest, Dungeon, Arctic, Ice, Lava…)

-Treasure
    -Either random generated (can be awesome for you), or player specific (the look on their faces when they finally get a Longsword +3 of Undeadbane and Holy and Sacred (Longsword +7, does +3+5attack and +5d6 damage to undead).

My suggestion is to mix these up.

-Challenges

    -Foes can be drawn to a battle, if the players are having an easy time, add more enemies
    -Impending doom, in the form of a bomb ticking off or a falling ceiling.
    -Calamity, the hostage is tied to the tracks and the train is coming
    -Prevent PC escape, destroy escape routes
    -Add a time limit
    -Bad tactical conditions, enemies have higher ground, players are in a killy spot…

-Give em a break every now and then

    -Free loot if they're great

-Improve NPC acting constantly, roll tables and act accordingly

-Villain Tips

        -Attack Innocents
        -Have professional Henchmen and spies, divination
        -Prevent party rest (50% of interruptions in wilderness, 10% in cities)
        -Target equipment occasionally, steal or sunder
        -Curses and long-term debuffs
        -Bribe their allies, betray them sometimes
        -Spread rumors about the PCs, give em a bad rep
        -Curse items and leave cursed loot
        -Have more disposable henchmen to drop into the grinder

-Combat Tips

        -Great descriptions
        -Great efficiency
        -Allow players to roleplay, and have NPCs roleplay during combat
        -At the end of every round, exchange a few sentences

STOLEN FROM GNOMESTEW

-If a PC wants to do something stupid, remember that you might be at fault. Maybe you said "entourage", meaning companions.

"The prince and his entourage entered the door."

When a player gets the idea to shoot a poison dart at the prince, explain in plain English. "The prince is not alone, and is surrounded by his armed entourage, gruff palace guardsmen. You might suffer a few casualties if you do that now. Are you sure you want to do that?"

The rogue's player might have thought that the Prince was alone. Or he might have

wanted to make a daring escape later. His call. Never control a PC. You have a world to control, and all they have is one measly character.

-Don't be a dick, demanding 3 pages of backstory from players.

3 shortterm goals, 1 longterm goal, a bit of family and a dash of motivation/hobby/profession.

A fighter's boring. An ex-blacksmith who got sick of being bossed around by his Crafter's Guild, and took up his best sword to go and find his fortune elsewhere is a bit more interesting. (profession)

The Blacksmith Fighter wants to forge a blade that a great hero will use, open his own Crafter's Guild, or Blacksmith Academy, or even a Fighter's Academy. (Long Term goals)

He has his ma' an' pa', both aging comfortably in a farm someplace else. He has a brother that's a thug, working for some low-rank criminals. (family)

His short term goal is doing something worthy of a fighter, like starting a warband, going on an adventure, or finally ridding that damned Iron mine from goblins.

There, a full fledged PC if I ever saw one.

- Never write an ending to a scene, just assume one

You players are a fickle sort that might just go murderhobo on your precious king. You didn't plan that, eh? The King was supposed to send them to battle a fire elemental, eh?

O well, shit happens. The King is dead.

What now?

Take your time, then do what comes natural. Noble houses infighting for ownership. Civil Wars. Bounty Hunters. Maybe even some Planars…

The point is, the players throw wrenches in your plans. Never write an ending to a scenario. Maybe they rescue the maiden your BBEG wizard wanted to disintegrate. Maybe she then becomes a Mage Hunter because the players trained her.

Just leave your story open, and watch the fun rolling in.

TO IMPROVISE WELL, YOU MUST KNOW THE SYSTEM VERY WELL

That up. Make improve tables, like a table where, for any level, you could pull a mob/npc from your ass and still have it relevant.

Steal shamelessly. Steal plots from movies, games, that thread from /tg/, anything. You mom's baking recipe is now a hunt for alchemical silver.

You become better at improve as you go.

Five mistakes from a newb GM

1. Railroad. You made the best plot, the best scenario, and everything is absolutely perfect in your pretty little head. The PCs will shoot the enemy sniper hiding in the tower right through his scope, score a nat20 and ride a German Stuka into enemy territory, then parachute into the second vent on the Tottenburg Castle of Nazies, descending into a maze and killing Iron Hitler with a precise shot to his left eye, but only after removing his right eyelash. What really happens is that your players get killed by MG42 rounds, or explosion shrapnel, or worse, they have no idea they need to latch onto the Stukas as they fly over.

   I'd know, 'cause I'm guilty as fuck for these types of scripts. Just set up a scene, and don't write the ending. Your plot shouldn't be a line, it should be islands. Hard to figure out, eh? Read up more
   http://www.gnomestew.com/gming-advice/5-mistakes-of-the-new-gm/
   http://www.gnomestew.com/gming-advice/island-design-theory/

2. You make a whole world. That's a big problem there, cutter, because, even if it's fun, your world will mostly go unnoticed by the players who don't give a fuck why the beggars in Thesomopoli always sleep facing the West.
   You should let the players act, then build the world around them.
   Make a doodle with a few ideas, don't make a whole world.

I have personally, a huge planet with like 4 continents that each have like 12 biomes, all smudged into a shitty World of Warcraft like patchwork map. Make the world around the players.

3. DMPCs. You want to play, eh? Well, berk, you're the DM, you're already playing. You are not a PC, and can never be one. You will make a pet NPC. You will fudge his stats, and make him really powerful. You will give him better gear. If you're really an asshole, you'll hold conversations between your DMPC and other NPCs, efficiently talking to yourself.

No DMPCs, ever.
Except when the party needs a dude, but make him a static mercenary instead of a DMPC. Make him expendable, and weaker than the players. Make him a one-trick pony that never steals the spotlight.

Never 1-up your players with your specul awsum NPCs, you're just rubbing your DMdick in their face that way. Make powerful villains, kill them, make it challenging, but never, never allow your DMPC to just win everything instead of your players.

4. You come up with 1 solution to the problem. Your players came up with 20 solutions that suck, and 4 solutions that kinda work, but not really.
Now, let's look at the problem here. No, your players are not fucking retarded.

Your players do not have the information you have. To them, their solutions might even look like the bee's knees, or snake's legs. So throw them a bone sometimes. Their solutions that kinda work now work well. (Still, punish totally retarded solutions)

Also, if their solution is better, just use their solution and say you planned this all along. Leaves your slaves… players feeling like Kings!

They have more heads and more brainpower than you, combined. Use their power.

BONUS:

Give em a room that has random shit in it, like furniture and stuff. They'll search the artistically painted room. You roll a d12. That roll is how many attempts they'll do until you let them go on. Let's say you rolled a 6. They try and try to touch up the walls, look under the bed, skin through the weird book they found on the table… On their sixth attempt, they search the mirror. You

now explain that the mirror is a one-way mirror, and the party's rogue was smart enough to figure that out. Hell yeah!

The players have no idea what the fuck happened, but they solved the puzzle. Smoke 'n mirrors, brother.

5. You are an autist/not a leader.

I kinda went overboard on that insult, but, let me convey it like this.
The worlds greatest, most imaginative, best players and a shit DM will have a shit game.

The world's greates, amazing, 28years of experience, DM will have a shit game if he invites shit players.

It's up to you, brother, to choose who gets to play with you. Your friends might be okay candidates, but they might be assholes in sheep's clothing. You are the one who must drop the crying hysterical player, you are the one who must play a tardwrangler (or kick out) the that guy, you are the fire that will burn down useless Monty Python or dick jokes.

You are the Keeper of your own game. You are the leader. Your players are your men/women/hermaphrodites/tulpas/imaginaryfriends.

Do not back down, do not get bullied into allowing them a magical item so obviously above their power level, you are here to keep the game fun.

And you must sacrifice to keep that fun. I've lost 3 groups of players. They liked my game, but I didn't like them. I despised their humor, I hated their "casual" attitude and gaming. One bloke even suggested we drop the game for a moment so we could watch this weeks hottest youtube shit.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY! BE STRONG.
You are the keeper of your fun, and the defender of your group's fun.
You must let some friends go if they're bad players.

FIRST TIME DM

0. Play the system under someone's wing if possible. This is a good step, but it can be avoided. Play under someone on Gamefinder, at least, or lurk these kinds of threads.

1. Don't expect much. Don't worry if you miss a few rules.
Hey, I wouldn't judge you, unless you adamantly did some stupid shit.
Play a rules light system for your first system. Simple D6 and such is fine.
Have fun.

2. Pick up on your player's reactions. Maybe they love combat, live for the kill. Then give em killing. Maybe they love talking and interacting with NPCs. Suddenly a Bazar, with lots of shopping and talking!
If you and your players have a resonance, like you both love killing, a lot, then you'll have even more fun. After a while, their killing when you want to roleplay, talk with NPCs or something, will be quite a burden on your soul.
Try to resonance with your players. If you're not having fun, stop playing.

3. Keep a low expectation. You won't suddenly beat STORYTIEM, or beat Los Tirbuton in storytelling. Your game, even when posted on /tg/, might not be enough to be put into the archive. Don't worry about that. You should just strive to have fun with your friends. Epic legends about an all barbarian party, a great DM, and a load of plane-hopping are currently, sadly, well beyond your reach. But do not worry, friend… For that gap will get smaller and smaller with every game.

RETCON

Don't do it. If you made a shitty mistake, like including castle Nifelheim from Magicka, annoying your players with shitty random wizards, or something shamefur like that, don't retcon it. Go with the flow.

Suddenly, Nifelheim's golem factory produces the deadliest golems that cast random spells whenever they slam. They have a 1 in a 1000 chance (two nat1s in a row on a d100%) to open a black hole that eats a whole city.

Sounds a bit better or worse, but whatever you do, don't retcon it.
My first campaign was a clusterfuck that produced a rich, yet broken, but still fun setting, a Golden Age right after an Apocalypse.

Your mistakes could be fun too. After all, if we always won, why roll dice…

Player narrative

Woah, this is new even for me.
I usually don't allow much narrative from players, but I allow total control of their characters.

Don't change shit from your PC's backstory. Maybe having two mom's is the selling point of their character. Work alongside the player, forge a backstory. Don't just change his shit out of the blue.

Ignore the rules if you want to. Don't ignore them all, but ignore some. Hardness and Item Health rules are a pain in the ass, almost no one uses those. Fireballs and Fire torching every item worn is also a pain in the ass. The look on your Wizard's face as you tell him his spellbook is destroyed by acid… Makes you feel dead inside. Don't.

Ignore the rules you don't like or find useful. Implement new rules.
Don't go overboard on the new rules either, berk. New rules require players to learn them all over again.
Players can only take so much abuse before they say you're not running D&D anymore, you're running MouseGuard with an inferior skill system.

All in moderation. Always.
You should remain True Neutral. After all, you're the ultimate Judge.

Honor the Dice Gods, new blood, honor them well.
But also decide when it's appropriate not to honor them.
That's what your DM's screen does. Let's you roll dice, and decide what you want to do.

That Goblin might have rolled two nat 20ties and ended your party Cleric's life, but getting turned into a kebab at the first session isn't that fun.
So leave the Cleric at -1 HP, and keep trucking.

This gives you an another tip. Always have their Character Sheets copied onto yer technomacheen. In .pdfs, or something. Make a small table with player's stats, including AC and Health. Make avg AC, and then make a monster that hits average AC on the roll of a 8, or on the roll of a 12. This is called improvisation, berk, I've talked about this before. Even write down their saves.

This is double protection in case your players feel like cheating.
I've cheated a bit as a player before, and probably most people.

Encourage players to listen to the dice gods. Check their dice for fakes or loaded dice. Don't punish failure too much, don't praise victory too much. You are the Judge.

FAILURE

You PCs will fail someday, somehow. Maybe they'll miss the entrance to the dungeon, maybe they'll be stuck running in circles due to no survival lel, maybe they'll get lost or kill an important NPC or miss an important clue.

Damage control, friend. The entrance is just beyond the ruins they'll pass in an hour (don't be too obvious with this, or they'll catch on the railroading)

After a few circles, they meet a guide who'll help, or a pack of bandits that have a map with them.

The important NPC that was killed has a diary, or a note about what to do next.

The failed check to find a letter hidden in a diary… That letter could come up somewhere, somehow. Maybe they'll succeed a check to search the staircase, and BOOM, there's the letter.

Don't always save their collective asses, but give 'em a nudge sometimes.
Nobody likes sitting around for 4 hours busting their brains over some shit.
Make them feel like champs. Maybe they'll make you feel like a champ too.

Ever heard of the Ming Vase rule?
Not really a rule, but a concept.

Let's say that in the middle of a battlefield, there's a Ming Vase on a pedestal.

Now, nowhere in the rules for standard d20 games will this vase be damaged. Nowhere. Unless someone targets it directly.

Now, is it normal or logical that a fragile object might survive combat better than the armor clad fighters around it?

Naw man, you shatter that shit on the next nat1 like it's nobody's business.
A nat 1 could leave a fighter's greatsword in a doorframe, or the rangers arrow in the chandelier that will fall the next round, smashing a couple of orcs down bellow. Shit needs to be chaotic. Really chaotic.

A nat 20 might crit, but the pain from the crit might also disarm the Orc.
Or worse, a nat 20 with a spear might hurt a bugbear, but now the bugbear just grabbed that spear tight, and you're flatfooted, son!

This breaks the rules, introduces chaos to fights.
Embrace the Chaos.

Also, nigga, allow your players to describe their attacks. Let them make "pretend" called shots with no penalties or bonuses. Let them have executions like in the first Dawn of War (God I loved that game, I'd make dozens of melee squads just to watch the juicy executions.)

Further reading here:
http://www.gnomestew.com/gming-advice/spicing-up-combat/

DON'T WASTE TIME ON POINTLESS ARGUMENTS. FUCK SON, DON'T

"This ain't how real life works, ya dig?"

Hey nig, in real life, getting stabbed with a greatsword would instantly kill your shit. Throwing a spell … Well, we ain't got no magic here.

Don't get too worked up about real life arguments. Maybe plate armor is really easy to wear, maybe poleaxes are too unwieldy, maybe Zweihanders don't have a -2 to attack penalty… But this shouldn't concern you if you're not playing a hardcore simulation.
D&D and roleplaying is a lot like Hollywood. Really. You don't know shit 'bout armor or swords, you never saw an orc in your life, you most likely never saw a Zweihander let alone held one, you most likely never felt a big wound, and maybe never been in a fist fight in your life.

We're just assuming here. For the sake of game's balance, it's usually best to leave the assumptions to the devs. A Zweihander doing 10d12 dice of damage might make sense to you, but let's leave it at 2d8 (large size glaive, easiest to compare).

Don't waste your or your players time on arguing about stupid shit.

"My character's a literal orphaned murderhobo that burned down his orphanage, his town, his continent. I know no one and no one can be taken from me."

This dude is seriously DMshocked. I'd feel sorry if a berk comes over and says this, because I know he's seen some shit. I'd make a full family with him, and wouldn't harm any of them. DM's do use family as plothooks, and often they're killed, but all should be used in moderation.

Don't go killing your player's backstory. That's a dickass move. They put a bit of thought into naming their wife and children. Don't just murder their shit. Maybe take them hostage, but this is a lot too.

Maybe put them in a rough financial situation tied in with the mob, this is kinda okay.

"I am not being a jerk, I am playing in character!"
http://www.gnomestew.com/gming-advice/dont-fall-for-these-rpg-arguments/#sthash.93qKyvR9.dpuf

I'd kick this shit right off my table. Tell him to have some common courtesy, fer fucks sake.
Goddamn I am pissed off just by looking at that statement.

Many of these types of players deserve to be kicked out on the spot.
Maybe you can save them, maybe you can't.
Your call.

"That's not written in the rules! You can't do that!"

Fuck the players who believe this. Roleplaying games aren't your Bethesda games where you can insert cheat items, play with the game's structural integrity, make the most ass-broken build and win everything, and then add porn mods.

A DM can break the rules. I personally let my boss enemies act a few times during one round.

ACT 1 is usually a buff or a spell with minor positioning
ACT 2 is usually a big telegraphed attack a la Dark Souls, the boss is gonna charge someone
ACT 3 comes when the round ends, players have had their time to get out of the way, they should have gotten out of the way. Anyone caught in the blast takes huge damage.

You can break rules, but don't overdo it. It's shit if a simple mook can act three times per round, run around the world a few times, and bring back a thermonuclear arrow to slay our PCs with.

"The Sanctity of the Dice"

You choose when to respect the dice Gods. The others must respect them.
No arguments. Don't get caught if your players are shit.

I don't use Google enough
http://www.gnomestew.com/tools-for-gms/12-ways-to-use-google-apps-at-the-game-table/

QUESTIONS FOR CHARACTERS

Where are you from?
This is a critical question, especially in a complex and divided world like Nirn. Were you born in your racial homeland, or on foreign shores? How does your Character view their birthplace? How were they treated there? Would they rather have been born somewhere else? How do other people view them in light of where they are from?
• **What is your family like?**

Are you an only child, or do you have brothers and sisters? What's your place in the family? Are you the eldest and the heir apparent, or the disowned wild child? Are your parents still alive? If not, how did they die?
• **What is your social class?**

Some careers have an implied social class, but others are rather flexible. Those in the upper classes often have all the advantages, but often the greatest heroes come from the lowest of places. What part of society did your parents come from? Did they pull themselves out of poverty? Are they still there? Or is your noble family destitute and on the verge of ruin? How has this influenced your life and your goals? How do you view it?
• **Why are you here now?**

What did you do before you came to be in the place you are now (or with the party if that's the case) and why did you stop? What did you see in an adventuring life?
• **How religious are you?**

Tamriel is a place where gods walk amongst mortals, but not all of them are worth of worship. How devout are you? Have you had an important religious experience in your life? Or do you believe the gods have abandoned you?
• **Who are your best friends and worst enemies?**

Ignoring the possibility that the other PCs fall into these categories, who in your life would you call a best friend or worst enemy? What happened to make things that way? Where are they now? Do you want to see them again?
• **What are your prized possessions?**

Do you have any items of sentimental value? Something passed down by your family, a friend, or a mentor? You should also think about important things you've already lost that you would do anything to get back.
• **Who are you loyal to?**

> Real loners are rare, Tamriel can be a dangerous place without allies. Are there people or organizations that you are loyal to? What did they do to earn your loyalty?

> Plagiarize stuff from shit your players haven't seen/watched/played

> It's not railroading if the players don't realize they're being railroaded

> Write down inconsequential shit your players do. Turn it into epic foreshadowing.

> Three steps, you are now a master GM

QUESTIONS FOR PCS

Where are You From?

> This is the most fundamental question for your character. Are you from a big city, like Altdorf, or a tiny farming hamlet? If you're a dwarf, are you karak-born, or from an outlying community or hold?

What is Your Family Like?

Are you an only child or do you have brothers and sisters? What's your place in the family? Are you parents still alive? If not, how did they die?

What is Your Social Class?

Some careers, such as Commoner and Burgher, have an implied social class. Others can work with a variety of social classes. Where in the social strata does your family fall? Have you moved up, socially, or fallen from grace?

What Did You Do Before You Became an Adventurer?

This is an important question. Your career provides a basic answer, but you refine this further. Try to figure out exactly what you did before you became an adventurer. The details you've already worked out and the skills you chose during character creation can help you make some decisions.

Why Did You Become an Adventurer?

An adventurer's life is dangerous. So what was it that made you choose this life of peril? Are you on a personal or political crusade? Are you out to get vengeance on those who ruined or murdered your family? Are you a thrill seeker or gold chaser?

How Religious are You?

Some folk are more pious than others. Are you particularly religious? If so, is there a God you favour? Are you constantly seeking answers or at peace with your faith? Initiates and Priests, of course, must make this decision early on.

Who are Your Friends and Enemies?

The other player characters may well be your best friends, but this isn't necessarily the case. You may not even know each other when play begins. So what friends do you have and where do they live? Are you on good terms or have you had a falling out? Similarly, do you have any enemies? If so, how did it happen? Friends can help you out in a pinch or turn into your most bitter enemies. GMs looking to make an adventure more meaningful can involve your character's personal enemies.

What are Your Prized Possessions?

Do you have any items of sentimental value? These need not be items of monetary value, but they should have special meaning for you. Is the rusty sword you wield the only thing your father ever gave you? Is the copper ring you wear a remembrance of your slain husband? You might also discuss with the GM important things that you've already lost and would do anything to get back.

Who are You Loyal to?

Real loners are rare in the Old World. It is too dangerous a place to get by without allies. Are there any people or organizations that you are loyal to? Your career might suggest an answer to this question, such as the Colleges of Magic or the Cult of Sigmar, but you might just as easily be loyal to an important person from your past.

Who do You Love/Hate?

Love and hate are the strongest of emotions. What place do they have in your life? Are you in love with someone? On the flipside, who do you hate and why? Vengeance is a strong

motivation and often linked to hatred. You may hate individuals (such as your enemies) or whole classes of people or creatures. If your wife was slain by Beastmen, for example, you might hate them above all other foes. Perhaps an unscrupulous bailiff caused your family to lose its home and now you are convinced that all nobles are crooks and scoundrels.